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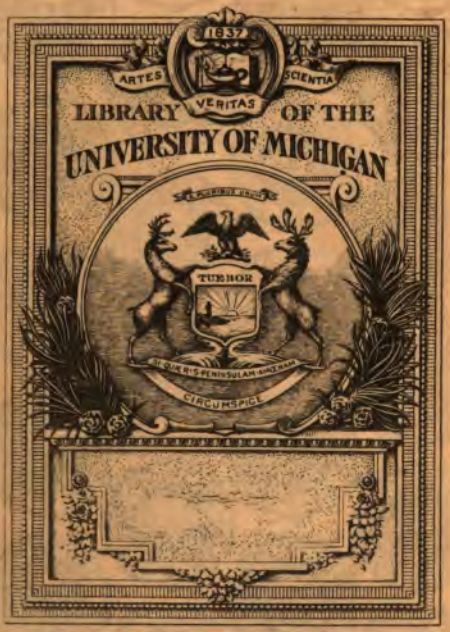
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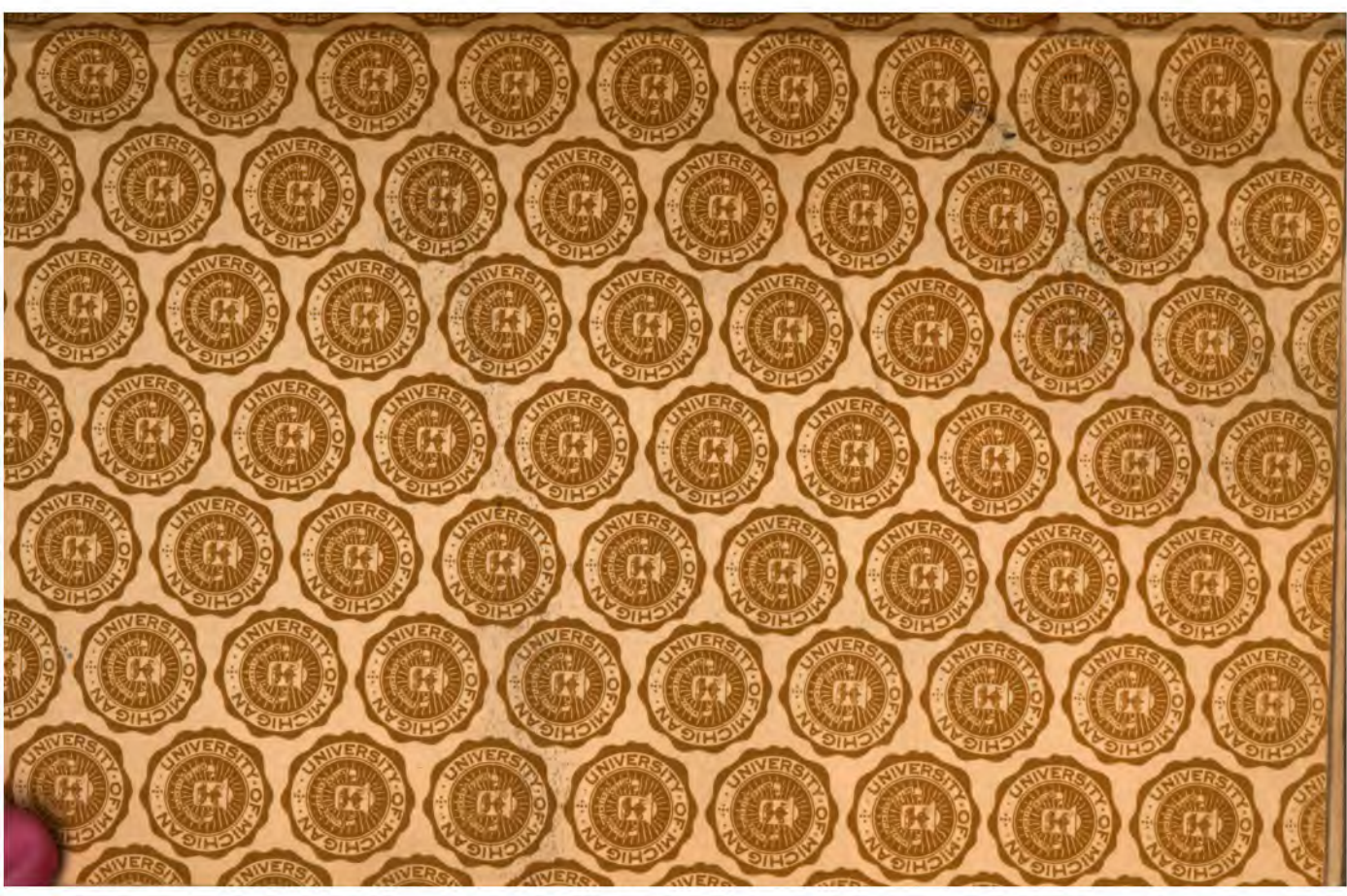
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TYPHOON

"A FAINT BURST OF LIGHTNING QUIVERED ALL ROUND, AS IF FLASHED INTO A BLACK AND SECRET CHAMBER OF THE SEA, WITH A FLOOR OF FOAMING CRESTS."

TYPHOON

By

JOSEPH CONRAD

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1918

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Typhoon

I

CAPTAIN MACWHIRR of the steamer *Nan-Shan* had a physiognomy that, in the order of material appearances, was the exact counterpart of his mind; it presented no marked characteristics of firmness or stupidity; it had no pronounced characteristics whatever: it was simply ordinary, irresponsive, and unruffled.

The only thing his aspect might have been said to suggest, at times, was bashfulness; because he would sit, in business offices ashore, sunburnt and smiling faintly, with downcast eyes. When he raised them they were perceived to be direct in their glance and of blue colour.

His hair was fair and extremely fine, clasping from temple to temple the bald dome of his skull in a clamp as of fluffy silk. The hair of his face, on the contrary, carroty and flaming, resembled a growth of copper wire clipped short to the line of the lip; while, no matter how close he shaved, fiery metallic gleams passed, when he moved his head, over the surface of his cheeks. He was rather below the medium height, a bit round-shouldered, and so sturdy of limb that his clothes always looked a shade too tight for his arms and legs. As if unable to grasp what is due to the difference of latitudes, he wore a brown bowler hat, a complete suit of a brownish hue, and clumsy black boots. These harbour togs gave to his thick figure an air of stiff and uncouth smartness. A thin silver watch-chain looped his waistcoat, and he never left his ship for the shore without clutching in his powerful hairy fist an elegant umbrella of the very best quality, but generally unrolled.

Young Jukes, the chief mate, attending his commander to the gangway, would sometimes venture to say with the greatest gentleness: "Allow me, sir"—and, possessing himself of the umbrella deferentially, would elevate the ferule, shake the folds, twirl a neat furl in a jiffy, and hand it back; going through the performance with a face of such portentous gravity that Mr. Solomon Rout, the chief-engineer, smoking his morning cigar over the skylight, would turn away his head in order to hide a smile. "Oh! Aye! The blessed gamp. . . . Thank 'ee, Jukes, thank 'ee," would mutter Captain MacWhirr heartily, without looking up.

Having just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself, and from the very same cause he was not in the least conceited. It is your imaginative superior who is touchy, overbearing, and difficult to please; but every

ship Captain MacWhirr commanded was the floating abode of harmony and peace. It was, in truth, as impossible for him to take a flight of fancy as it would be for a watch-maker to put together a chronometer with nothing except a two-pound hammer and a whip-saw in the way of tools. Yet the uninteresting lives of men so entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence have their mysterious side. It was impossible in Captain MacWhirr's case, for instance, to understand what under heaven could have induced that perfectly satisfactory son of a petty grocer in Belfast to run away to sea. And yet he had done that very thing at the age of fifteen. It was enough, when you thought it over, to give you the idea of an immense, potent, and invisible hand thrust into the ant-heap of the earth, laying hold of shoulders, knocking heads together, and setting the unconscious faces of the multitude towards inconceivable goals and in undreamt-of directions.

His father never really forgave him for this undutiful stupidity. "We could have got on without him," he used to say, later on; "but there 's the business. And he an only son, too!" His mother wept very much after his disappearance. As it had never occurred to him to leave word behind, he was mourned over for dead till, after eight months, his first letter arrived from Taleahuano. It was short and contained the statement, "We had very fine weather on our passage out." But evidently, in the writer's mind, the only important intelligence was to the effect that his Captain had, on the very day of writing, entered him regularly on the ship's articles as Ordinary Seaman. "Because I can do the work," he explained. The mother again wept copiously, while the remark, "Tom 's an ass," expressed the emotions of the father. He was a corpulent man, with a gift for sly chaffing, which to the end of his life he exercised in his intercourse with his son, a

little pityingly, as if upon a half-witted person.

MacWhirr's visits to his home were necessarily rare, and in the course of years he despatched other letters to his parents, informing them of his succcessive promotions and of his movements upon the vast earth. In these missives could be found sentences like this: "The heat here is very great"; or, "On Xmas day at 4 P.M. we fell in with some icebergs." The old people became ultimately acquainted with a good many names of ships and with the names of the skippers who commanded them, with the names of Scotch and English shipowners, with the names of seas, oceans, straits, promontories; with outlandish names of lumber-ports, of rice-ports, of cotton-ports; with the names of islands; with the name of their son's young woman. She was called Lucy. It did not suggest itself to him to mention whether he thought the name pretty. And then they died.

The great day of MacWhirr's marriage came in due course, following shortly upon the great day when he got his first command. All these events had taken place many years before the morning when, in the chart-room of the steamer *Nan-Shan*, he stood confronted by the fall of a barometer he had no reason to distrust. The fall—taking into account the excellence of the instrument, the time of the year, and the ship's position on the terrestrial globe—was of a nature ominously prophetic, but the red face of the man betrayed no sort of inward disturbance. Omens were as nothing to him, and he was unable to discover the message of a prophecy till the fulfilment had brought it home to his very door. "That 's a fall and no mistake," he thought. "There must be some uncommonly dirty weather knocking about."

II

THE *Nan-Shan* was on her way from the southward to the treaty port of Fu-chau with some cargo in her lower holds and two hundred Chinese coolies returning to their village homes in the province of Fo-Kien, after a few years of work in various tropical colonies. The morning was fine, the oily sea heaved without a sparkle, and there was a queer white, misty patch in the sky like a halo of the sun. The fore-deck, packed with Chinamen, was full of sombre clothing, yellow faces, and pigtails, and sprinkled over with a good many naked shoulders, for there was no wind, and the heat was close. The coolies lounged, talked, smoked, or stared over the rail; some, drawing water over the side, sluiced each other; a few slept on hatches, while several small part-

DRAWING -B
ENGLISH -C

ies of six sat on their heels, surrounding iron trays with plates of rice and tiny teacups; and every single Celestial of them was carrying with him all he had in the world—a wooden chest with a ringing lock and brass on the corners, containing the savings of his labour: some clothes of ceremony, sticks of incense, a little opium maybe, bits of nameless rubbish of conventional value, and a small hoard of silver dollars, toiled for in coal-lighters, won in gambling-houses or in petty trading, grubbed out of earth, sweated out in mines, on railway lines, in deadly jungle, under heavy burdens—amassed patiently, guarded with care, cherished fiercely.

A cross swell had set in from the direction of Formosa channel about ten o'clock without disturbing these passengers much, because the *Nan-Shan*, with her flat bottom, rolling chocks on bilges, and great breadth of beam, had a reputation of an exceptionally steady ship in a seaway. Mr. Jukes, in moments of expansion

on shore, would proclaim loudly that the "old girl was as good as she was pretty." It would never have occurred to Captain MacWhirr to express his favourable opinion so loud or in terms so fanciful.

She was a good ship, undoubtedly, and not old, either. She had been built in Dumbarton less than three years before to the order of a firm of merchants in Siam—Messrs. Sigg & Son. When she lay afloat, finished in every detail and ready to take up the work of her life, the builders contemplated her with pride. "Sigg has asked us for a reliable skipper to take her out," remarked one of the partners; and the other, after reflecting for a while, said: "I think MacWhirr is ashore just at present."

"Is he? Then wire him at once. He 's the very man," declared the senior, without a moment's hesitation.

Next morning, MacWhirr stood before them unperturbed, having travelled from

London by the midnight express, after a sudden but undemonstrative parting with his wife. She was the daughter of a superior couple who had seen better days.

"We had better be going together over the ship, Captain," said the senior partner; and the three men started to explore the perfections of the *Nan-Shan* from stem to stern and from keelson to the trucks of her two stumpy pole-masts. Captain MacWhirr had begun by taking off his coat, which he hung on the end of a steam-windlass embodying all the latest improvements.

"My uncle wrote of you favourably by yesterday's mail to our good friends, Messrs. Sigg, you know; and doubtless they 'll continue you out there in command," said the junior. "You 'll be able to boast of being in charge of the handiest boat of her size on the coast of China, Captain," he added.

"Have you? Thank 'ee," mumbled vaguely MacWhirr, to whom the view of

a distant eventuality could appeal no more than the beauty of a wide landscape to a purblind tourist; and his eyes happening at the moment to be at rest upon the lock of the cabin door, he walked up to it, full of purpose, and began to rattle the handle vigorously, while he observed in his low earnest voice: "You can't trust the workmen nowadays. A brand new lock, and it won't act at all. Stuck fast. See? See?"

As soon as they found themselves alone in their office across the yard: "You praised that fellow up to Sigg. What is it you see in him?" asked the nephew, with faint contempt.

"I admit he has nothing of your fancy skipper about him, if that's what you mean," said the elder man, curtly. "Is the foreman of the joiners on the *Nan-Shan* outside?—Come in, Bates. How is it that you let Tait's people put us off with a defective lock on the cabin door? The Captain could see directly he set eye on it. Have it replaced at once. The

little straws, Bates; the little straws." The lock was replaced accordingly, and a few days afterwards the *Nan-Shan* steamed out to the East without MacWhirr having offered any further remark as to her fittings, or having been heard to utter a single word hinting at pride in his ship, gratitude for his appointment, or satisfaction at his prospects.

With a temperament neither loquacious nor taciturn, he found very little occasion to talk. There were matters of duty, of course,—directions, orders, and so on, but the past being to his mind done with, and the future not there yet, the more general actualities of the day required no comment, because facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision.

Old Mr. Sigg liked a man of few words, and one that "you could be sure would not try to improve upon his instructions." MacWhirr, satisfying these requirements, was continued in command of the *Nan-Shan*, and applied himself to the careful

navigation of his ship in the China seas. She had come out on a British register, but, after some time, Messrs. Sigg judged it expedient to transfer her to the Siamese flag.

At the news of the contemplated transfer, Jukes grew restless, as if under a sense of personal affront. He went about grumbling to himself and uttering short, scornful laughs. "Fancy having a ridiculous Noah's-ark elephant in the ensign of one's ship," he said once at the engine-room door. "Dash me if I can stand it. I 'll throw up the billet. Don't it make *you* sick, Mr. Rout?" The chief-engineer only cleared his throat with the air of a man who knows the value of a good billet.

The first morning the new flag floated over the stern of the *Nan-Shan*, Jukes stood looking at it bitterly from the bridge. He struggled with his feelings for a while, and then remarked: "Queer flag for a man to sail under, sir."

"What 's the matter with the flag?" in-

quired Captain MacWhirr. "Seems all right to me." And he walked across to the end of the bridge to have a good look.

"Well, it is queer to me," burst out Jukes, greatly exasperated, and flung off the bridge.

Captain MacWhirr was amazed at these manners. After a while he stepped quietly into the chart-room and opened his *International Signal Code-Book* at the place where the flags of all the nations are correctly figured in gaudy rows. He ran his finger over them, and when he came to Siam he contemplated with great attention the red field and the white elephant. Nothing could be more simple; but to make sure he brought the book out on the bridge for the purpose of comparing the coloured drawing with the real thing at the flagstaff astern. When next Jukes, who was carrying on the duty that day with a sort of suppressed fierceness, happened on the bridge his commander observed:

"There 's nothing amiss with that flag."

"Is n't there?" mumbled Jukes, falling on his knees before a deck-locker and jerking therefrom viciously a spare lead-line.

"No. I looked up the book. Length twice the breadth and the elephant exactly in the middle. I thought the people ashore would know how to make the local flag. Stands to reason. You were wrong, Jukes."

"Well, sir," began Jukes, getting up excitedly, "all I can say—" He fumbled for the end of the coil of line with trembling hands.

"That 's all right." Captain MacWhirr soothed him, sitting heavily on a little canvas folding stool he greatly affected. "All you have to do is to take care they don't hoist the elephant upside down before they get quite used to it."

Jukes flung the new lead-line over on the fore-deck with a loud "Here you are, bo'sn. Don't forget to wet it

"'ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TO TAKE CARE THAT THEY DON'T HOIST THE ELEPHANT UPSIDE-DOWN.'"

thoroughly," and turned with immense resolution towards his commander, but Captain MacWhirr spread his elbows on the bridge-rail comfortably.

"Because it would be, I suppose, understood as a signal of distress," he went on. "What do you think? That elephant there, I take it, stands for something in the nature of the Union-Jack in the flag."

"Does it?" yelled Jukes so that every head on the *Nan-Shan's* decks looked towards the bridge. Then he sighed, and with sudden resignation, "It would certainly be a damn distressful sight," he said meekly.

Later in the day he accosted the chief engineer with a confidential "Here! Let me tell you the old man's latest."

Mr. Solomon Rout (frequently alluded to as Long Sol, Old Sol, or Father Rout), from finding himself almost invariably the tallest man on board every ship he joined, had acquired the habit of a stooping, leisurely condescension. His hair was scant

and sandy, his flat cheeks were pale, his bony wrists and long scholarly hands were pale, too, as though he had lived all his life in the shade.

He smiled from on high at Jukes and went on smoking and glancing about quietly, in the manner of a kind uncle lending an ear to the tale of an excited schoolboy. Then, greatly amused but impassive, he asked:

"And did you throw up the billet?"

"No," cried Jukes, in a weary, discouraged voice, above the harsh buzz of the *Nan-Shan's* friction winches. All of them were hard at work, snatching slings of cargo, high up, to the end of long derricks, only, as it seemed, to let them rip down recklessly by the run. The cargo chains groaned in the gins, clinked on coamings, rattled over the side; and the whole ship quivered, with her long grey flanks smoking in wreaths of steam. "No," cried Jukes; "I did n't. What 's the good? I might just as well fling my

resignation at this bulkhead. I don't believe you can make a man like that understand anything. He simply knocks me over."

At that moment, Captain MacWhirr, back from the shore, crossed the deck, umbrella in hand, escorted by a mournful, self-possessed Chinaman, walking behind in paper-soled silk shoes, who also carried an umbrella.

The master of the *Nan-Shan*, speaking just audibly and gazing at his boots as his manner was, remarked that it would be necessary to call at Fu-chau this trip, and desired Mr. Rout to have steam up tomorrow afternoon at one o'clock, sharp. He pushed back his hat to wipe his forehead, observing at the same time that he hated going ashore, anyhow; while overtopping him, Mr. Rout, without deigning a word, smoked austerely, nursing his right elbow in the palm of his left hand. Then Jukes was directed in the same subdued voice to keep the forward 'tween-

deck clear of cargo. Two hundred coolies were going to be put down there. The Bun Hin Company were sending that lot home. Twenty-five bags of rice would be coming off in a sampan directly for stores. All seven-years' men they were, said Captain MacWhirr, with a chest to every man. The carpenter should be set to work nailing three-inch battens along the deck below, fore and aft, to keep these boxes from shifting in a seaway. Jukes had better look to it at once. "D' ye hear, Jukes?" This Chinaman here was coming with the ship as far as Fu-chau—a sort of interpreter he would be. Bun Hin's clerk he was, and wanted to have a look at the space. Jukes had better take him forward. "D' ye hear, Jukes?"

Jukes took good care to punctuate these instructions in proper places with the obligatory "Yes, sir," ejaculated without enthusiasm. His brusque "Come along, John. Make look see," set the Chinaman in motion at his heels.

"Wanchee look see, all same look see can do," said Jukes, who, having no talent for foreign languages, mangled the very pigeon English cruelly. He pointed at the open hatch. "Catchee number one piecie place to sleep in. Eh?"

He was gruff, as became his racial superiority, but not unfriendly. The Chinaman, gazing sad and speechless into the darkness of the hatchway, seemed to stand at the head of a yawning grave.

"No catchee rain down there—savee?" pointed out Jukes. "Suppose allee same fine weather, one piecie coolie-man come topside," he pursued, warming up imaginatively. "Make so — phooooo!" He expanded his chest and blew out his cheeks. "Savee, John? Breathe—fresh air. Good. Eh? Washee him piecie pants, chow-chow topside see, John?"

With his mouth and hands he made exuberant motions of eating rice and washing clothes, and the Chinaman, who concealed his distrust of this pantomime

under a collected demeanour, tinged by a gentle and refined melancholy, glanced out of his almond eyes from Jukes to the hatch and back again. "Velly good," he murmured, in a disconsolate undertone, and, hastening smoothly along the decks, dodging obstacles in his course, he disappeared, ducking low under a sling of ten dirty gunny-bags full of some costly merchandise and exhaling a repulsive smell.

III

CAPTAIN MACWHIRR meantime had gone on the bridge and into the chart-room, where a letter, commenced two days before, awaited termination. These long letters began with the words, "My darling wife," and the steward, between the scrubbing of the floors and the dusting of chronometer-boxes, snatched at every opportunity to read them. They interested him much more than they possibly could the woman for whose eye they were intended; and for this reason, that they related in minute detail each successive trip of the *Nan-Shan*.

Her master, faithful to facts, which alone his consciousness reflected, would set them down with painstaking care upon many pages. The house, in a Northern

suburb, to which these pages were addressed, had a bit of garden before the bow-windows, a deep porch of good appearance, coloured glass with imitation lead frame in the front door. He paid five-and-forty pounds a year for it, and did not think the rent too high, because Mrs. MacWhirr, a pretentious person with a scraggy neck and a disdainful manner, was admittedly ladylike, and in the neighbourhood considered as "quite superior." The only secret of her life was her abject terror of the time when her husband would come home to stay for good. Under the same roof there dwelt also a daughter called Lydia, and a son, Tom. These two were but slightly acquainted with their father. Mainly, they knew him as a rare but privileged visitor, who of an evening smoked his pipe in the dining-room and slept in the house. The lanky girl, upon the whole, was rather ashamed of him; the boy was frankly and utterly indifferent, in a straightfor-

ward, delightful, unaffected way manly boys have.

And Captain MacWhirr wrote home from the coast of China twelve times every year, desiring queerly to be "remembered to the children," and subscribing himself "Your loving husband" as calmly as if the words so long used by so many men were, apart from their shape, worn out things of a faded meaning.

The China seas, North and South, are narrow seas. They are seas full of every-day, eloquent facts, such as islands, sand-banks, reefs, swift and changeable currents—tangled facts that nevertheless speak to a seaman in clear and definite language. Their speech appealed to Captain MacWhirr's sense of realities so forcibly that he had given up his state-room below and practically lived all his days on the bridge of his ship, often having his meals sent up, and sleeping at night in the chart-room. And he indited there his home letters. Each of them

without exception, contained the phrase, "The weather has been very fine this trip," or some other form of a statement to that effect. And this statement, too, in its wonderful persistence, was of the same perfect accuracy as all the others they contained.

Mr. Rout likewise wrote letters, only no one on board knew how chatty he could be, pen in hand, because the chief-engineer had enough imagination to keep his desk locked. His wife relished his style greatly. They were a childless couple, and Mrs. Rout—a big, high-bosomed, jolly woman of forty,—shared with Mr. Rout's toothless and venerable mother a little cottage near Teddington. She would run over her correspondence at breakfast with lively eyes, and scream out interesting passages in a joyous voice at the deaf old lady, prefacing each extract by the warning shout, "Solomon says!" She had the trick of firing off Solomon's utterances also upon strangers, astonish-

ing them easily by the unfamiliar text and the unexpectedly jocular vein of these quotations. On the day the new curate called for the first time at the cottage, she found occasion to remark, "As Solomon says, the engineers that go down to the sea in ships behold the wonders of sailor nature"; when a change in the visitor's countenance made her stop and stare.

"Solomon! Oh!—Mrs. Rout!" stuttered the young man, startled, shocked, and red in the face. "I must say—I don't——"

"He 's my husband," she announced in a great shout, throwing herself back in the chair. Perceiving the joke, she laughed immoderately with a handkerchief to her eyes, while he sat wearing a forced smile and, from his inexperience of jolly women, was persuaded that she must be deplorably insane. They were excellent friends afterwards; for, absolving her from irreverent intention, he came to think she was a very worthy person

indeed; and he learned in time to receive without flinching other scraps of Solomon's wisdom.

"For my part," Solomon was reported by his wife to have said once, "give me the dullest ass for a skipper before a rogue. There is a way to take a fool, but a rogue is smart and slippery." This was an airy generalisation drawn from the particular case of Captain MacWhirr's honesty, which, in itself, had the heavy obviousness of a lump of clay. On the other hand, Mr. Jukes, unable to generalise, unmarried, and unengaged, was in the habit of opening his heart after another fashion to an old chum and former shipmate, actually serving as second officer on board an Atlantic liner.

First of all, he would insist upon the advantages of the Eastern trade, hinting at its superiority to the Western ocean service. He extolled the sky, the seas, the ships, and the easy life of the Far East. The *Nan-Shan*, he affirmed, was

second to none as a sea-boat. "We have no brass-bound uniforms, but then we are like brothers here," he wrote. "We all mess together and live like fighting cocks. . . . All the chaps of the black-squad are as decent as they make that kind, and old Sol, the chief, is a dry stick. We are good friends. As to our old man, you could not find a quieter skipper. Sometimes you would think he had n't sense enough to see anything wrong. And yet it is n't that. Can't be. He has been in command for a good few years now. He does n't do anything actually foolish, and gets his ship along all right without worrying anybody. I believe he has n't brains enough to enjoy kicking up a row. I don't take advantage of him. I would scorn it. Outside the routine of duty he does n't seem to understand more than half of what you tell him. We get a laugh out of this at times, but it is dull, too, to be with a man like this—in the long run. Old Sol says he has n't much

conversation. Conversation! Oh, Lord! He never talks. The other day I had been yarning under the bridge with one of the engineers, and he must have heard us. When I came up to take my watch he steps out of the chart-room and has a good look all round, peeps over at the sidelights, glances at the compass, squints upwards at the stars. That 's his regular performance. By-and-bye he says: 'Was that you talking just now in the port alley-way?'—'Yes, sir.'—'With the third engineer?'—'Yes, sir.' He walks off to starboard and sits under the dodger on a little campstool of his and for half an hour, perhaps, he makes no sound except that I heard him sneeze once. Then after a while I hear him getting up over there and he strolls across to port where I was. 'I can't understand what you can find to talk about,' says he. 'Two solid hours. I am not blaming you. I see people ashore at it all day long, and then in the evening they sit down and keep at

it over the drinks. Must be saying the same things over and over again. I can't understand.' Did you ever hear anything like that? And he was so patient about it! It made me quite sorry for him. But he is exasperating, too, sometimes. Of course, one would not do anything to vex him even if it were worth while. But it is n't. He 's so jolly dense that if you were to put your thumb to your nose and wave your fingers at him, he would only wonder gravely to himself what got into you. He told me once quite simply that he found it very difficult to make out what made people always act so queerly. He 's too dense to trouble about and that 's the truth."

Thus wrote Mr. Jukes to his chum in the Western ocean trade, out of the fulness of his heart and the liveliness of his fancy.

He had expressed his honest opinion. It was not worth while trying to impress a man like that. If the world had

been full of such men life would have probably appeared to Jukes an unentertaining and unprofitable business. He was not alone in his opinion. The sea itself, as if sharing Mr. Jukes's good-natured forbearance, had never put itself out to startle the silent man who seldom looked up and wandered innocently over the waters with the only visible purpose of getting food, raiment, and house-room for three people ashore. Dirty weather he had known, of course. He had been made wet, uncomfortable, tired in the usual way,—felt at the time and presently forgotten. So that upon the whole he had been justified in reporting fine weather at home. But he had never been given a glimpse of immeasurable strength and of immoderate wrath, the wrath that passes exhausted but never appeased—the wrath and fury of the passionate sea. He knew it existed, as we know that crime and abominations exist; he had heard of it as a peaceable citizen in a town hears

of battles, famines, and floods, and yet knows nothing of what these things mean, though, indeed, he may have been mixed up in a street row, have gone without his dinner once, or been soaked to the skin in a shower. He sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence and sink at last into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it contains of perfidy, violence, and terror. There are on sea and land such men, thus fortunate, or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea.

IV

OBSERVING the steady fall of the barometer, Captain MacWhirr thought, "There's some dirty weather knocking about." This is precisely what he thought. He had had an experience of moderately dirty weather, the term dirty, as applied to the weather in itself, implying only moderate discomfort to the seaman. Had he been informed by an indisputable authority that the end of the world was to be finally accomplished by a catastrophic disturbance of the atmosphere, he would have assimilated the information under the simple idea of dirty weather, and no other, because he had no experience of cataclysms and belief does not necessarily imply comprehension. The wisdom of his country had pronounced by means of an Act of Parlia-

ment that before he could be considered as fit to take charge of a ship he should be able to answer certain simple questions on the subject of circular storms, such as hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons,—and apparently he had answered them, since he was now in command of the *Nan-Shan* in the China seas during the season of typhoons. But if he had answered, he remembered nothing of it. He was, however, conscious of being made uncomfortable by the clammy heat. He came out on the bridge and found no relief to this oppression. The air seemed thick. He gasped like a fish and began to believe himself greatly out of sorts.

The *Nan-Shan* was ploughing a vanishing furrow upon the circle of the sea that had a surface like a piece of grey satin; and under this surface slow undulations passed, unbroken and smooth, swinging the ship bodily up and down at regular intervals. The white patch of mist declined down the sky together with the

sun which, pale and without rays, poured a leaden heat in a strangely indecisive light, and the Chinamen were lying prostrate about the decks. Their bloodless, pinched yellow faces were like the faces of bilious invalids. Captain MacWhirr noticed two of them especially, stretched out on their backs below the bridge. As soon as they had closed their eyes they seemed dead. Three others, however, were quarrelling barbarously away forward, and one big fellow, half naked, with herculean shoulders, was hanging limply over a winch; while another, sitting on the deck, his knees up and his head drooping sideways in a girlish attitude, was plaiting his tail with infinite languor depicted in his whole person and in the very movement of his fingers. The smoke struggled with difficulty out of the funnel, and instead of streaming away spread out like an infernal sort of cloud, smelling of sulphur and raining soot on the decks.

"THE SUN, PALE AND WITHOUT RAYS, POURED A LEADEN HEAT, AND THE CHINAMEN WERE LYING PROSTRATE ABOUT THE DECKS."

"What the devil are you doing there, Mr. Jukes?" asked Captain MacWhirr.

This unusual form of address, though mumbled rather than spoken, caused the body of Mr. Jukes to start as though it had been prodded under the fifth rib. He had had a low bench brought on the bridge, and, sitting on it with a length of rope curled about his feet and a piece of canvas stretched over his knees, was pushing a sail-needle vigorously. He looked up, and his surprise gave to his eyes an expression of innocence and candour.

"I am only roping some of that new set of bags we made last trip for whipping up coals," he remonstrated gently. "We shall want them for the next coaling, sir."

"What became of the others?"

"Why! Worn out, of course, sir."

Captain MacWhirr, after glaring down irresolutely at his chief mate, disclosed the gloomy and cynical conviction that more than half of them had been lost overboard, "if only the truth was known,"

and retired to the other end of the bridge. Jukes, exasperated by this unprovoked attack, broke the needle at the second stitch; and, dropping his work, got up and cursed the heat in a violent undertone.

The propeller thumped, the three Chinamen forward had given up squabbling very suddenly, and the one who had been plaiting his tail clasped his legs and stared dejectedly over his knees. The lurid sunshine cast faint and sickly shadows. The swell ran higher and swifter every moment, and the ship lurched heavily in the smooth, deep hollows of the sea.

"I wonder where that beastly swell comes from," said Jukes aloud, recovering himself after a stagger.

"Northeast," grunted the literal MacWhirr, from his side of the bridge. "There 's some dirty weather knocking about. Go and look at the glass."

When Jukes came out of the chart-room

the cast of his countenance had changed to thoughtfulness and concern. He caught hold of the bridge-rail and stared ahead.

The temperature in the engine-room had gone up to 110 degrees. Irritated voices were ascending through the sky-light and through the fiddle of the stoke-hole. They made a harsh and resonant uproar, mingled with angry clangs and scrapes of metal, as if men with limbs of iron and throats of bronze had been quarrelling down there. The second engineer was falling foul of the stokers for letting the steam go down. He was a man with arms like a blacksmith and generally feared, but that afternoon the stokers were answering him back recklessly and slammed the furnace doors with the fury of despair. Then the noise ceased suddenly and the second engineer appeared, emerging out of the stoke-hole, streaked with grime and soaking wet, like a chimney-sweep coming out of a well. As soon as his head was clear of the fiddle he

began upbraiding Jukes for not trimming properly the stoke-hole ventilators, and in answer Jukes made with his hands deprecatory, soothing signs, meaning: no wind —can't be helped—you can see for yourself. But the other would n't hear reason. His teeth flashed angrily in his dirty face, and he cursed like a madman. He did n't mind, he said, the trouble of punching their blanked heads down there, blank his soul, but did the condemned sailors think you could keep steam up in the God-forsaken boilers simply by knocking the blanked stokers about? No, by George! You had to get some draught, too—may he be everlastingly blanked for a swab-headed deck-hand, if you did n't! And the chief, too, rampaging before the steam-gauge and carrying on like a lunatic all over the engine-room ever since noon. What did Jukes think he was stuck up there for, if he could n't get one of his decayed, good-for-nothing, deck-cripples to turn the ventilators to the wind?

The relations of the "engine-room" and the "deck" of the *Nan-Shan* were, as is known, of a brotherly nature; therefore Jukes leaned over and begged the other in a restrained tone not to make a disgusting ass of himself—the skipper was on the other side of the bridge. But the second declared mutinously that he did n't care who was on the other side of the bridge, and Jukes, passing in a flash from lofty disapproval into a state of exaltation, invited him in unflattering terms to come up and twist the beastly things to please himself, and to catch such wind as a donkey of his sort could find. The second rushed up to the fray. He flung himself at the port ventilator as though he meant to tear it out bodily and toss it overboard. All he did was to move round the cowl a few inches, with an enormous expenditure of force, and seemed spent in the effort. He leaned against the back of the wheel-house, and Jukes walked up to him.

"Oh, heavens!" ejaculated the engineer in a feeble voice. He lifted his eyes to the sky and then let his glassy stare descend to meet the horizon that, tilting up to an angle of forty degrees, seemed to hang on a slant for awhile and settle down slowly. "Heavens! Phew! What's up, anyhow?"

Jukes, straddling his long legs like a pair of compasses, put on an air of superiority. "We're going to catch it this time," he said. "The barometer is tumbling down like anything, Harry. And you trying to kick up that silly row."

It seemed as though the word "barometer" had revived the second engineer's mad animosity. Collecting afresh all his energies he directed Jukes in a low and brutal tone to shove the unmentionable instrument down his gory throat. Who cared for his crimson barometer? It was the steam—the steam—that was going down; and what between the firemen going faint and the chief going silly, it

was worse than a dog's life for him; and he did n't care a tinker's curse how soon the whole show was blown out of the water. He seemed on the point of having a cry, but, after regaining his breath, he muttered darkly, "I 'll faint them," and dashed off. He stopped upon the fiddle long enough to shake his fist at the unnatural daylight and dropped into the dark hole with a whoop.

V

WHEN Jukes turned round, his eyes fell upon the rounded back and the big red ears of Captain MacWhirr, who had come across. He did not look at his chief officer, but said at once:

"That 's a very violent man, that second engineer."

"Jolly good second, anyhow," grunted Jukes. "They can't keep up steam," he added rapidly, and made a grab at the rail against the coming lurch.

Captain MacWhirr, unprepared, took a run and brought himself up with a jerk by an awning stanchion.

"A profane man," he said obstinately. "If this goes on I 'll have to get rid of him the first chance."

"It 's the heat," said Jukes. "The weather 's awful. It would make a saint

swear. Even up here I feel exactly as if I had my head tied up in a woollen blanket."

Captain MacWhirr looked up.

"D' ye mean to say, Mr. Jukes, you ever had your head tied up in a blanket? What was that for?"

"It 's a manner of speaking, sir," said Jukes, stolidly.

"Some of you fellows do go on! What 's that about saints swearing? I wish you would n't talk so wild. What sort of saint would that be that would swear? No more saint than yourself, I expect. And what 's a blanket got to do with it—or the weather either? The heat does not make me swear—does it? It 's filthy bad temper. That 's what it is. And what 's the good of you talking like this? . . ."

Thus Captain MacWhirr expostulated against the use of images in speech, and at the end electrified Jukes by a contemptuous snort followed by words of passion

and resentment. "Damme! I 'll fire him out of the ship if he don't look out."

And Jukes, incorrigible, thought:

"Goodness me! Somebody 's put a new inside to my old man. Here 's temper, if you like. Of course it 's the weather; what else? It would make an angel quarrelsome—let alone a saint."

All the Chinamen on deck appeared at their last gasp.

At its setting the sun had a diminished diameter and an expiring brown, rayless glow, as if millions of centuries elapsing since the morning had brought it near its end. A dense bank of cloud became visible to the northward: it had a sinister dark olive tint, and lay low and motionless upon the sea, resembling a solid obstacle in the path of the ship. She went floundering towards it like an exhausted creature driven to its death. The coppery twilight retired slowly, and the darkness brought out overhead a swarm of unsteady big stars that, as if blown upon,

flickered exceedingly and seemed to hang very near the earth. At eight o'clock Jukes went into the chart-room to write up the ship's log.

He copied neatly out of the rough-book the number of miles, the course of the ship, and in the column for "Wind" he scrawled the word "Calm" from top to bottom of the eight hours since noon. He was exasperated by the continuous, monotonous rolling of the ship. The heavy inkstand would slide away in a manner that suggested perverse intelligence in dodging the pen. Having written in the large space under the head of "Remarks," "Heat very oppressive," he stuck the end of the penholder in his teeth, pipe-fashion, and mopped his face carefully.

"Ship rolling heavily in a high cross-swell," he began again, and commented to himself, "'Heavily' is no word for it." Then he wrote: "Sunset threatening, with a low bank of clouds to N. and E. Sky clear overhead."

Sprawling over the table with arrested pen he glanced out of the door, and in that frame of his vision he saw all the stars flying upwards between the teak-wood jambs on a black sky. The whole lot took flight together and disappeared, leaving only a blackness flecked with white flashes, for the sea was as black as the sky and speckled with foam afar. The stars had flown to the roll and came back on the return swing of the ship, rushing downwards in a swarming glitter not of fiery points but enlarged to tiny discs, brilliant with a clear, wet sheen.

He watched the flying big stars for a moment, and then wrote: "8 P.M. Swell increasing. Ship labouring and taking water on her decks. Battened down the coolies for the night. Barometer still falling." He paused and thought to himself, "Perhaps nothing whatever 'll come of it." And then he closed resolutely his entries: "Every appearance of a typhoon coming on."

On going out he had to stand aside, and Captain MacWhirr strode over the doorstep without saying a word or making a sign.

"Shut the door, Mr. Jukes, will you?" he cried from within.

Jukes turned back to do so, muttering ironically, "Afraid to catch cold, I suppose." It was his watch below, but he yearned for communion with his kind; and he remarked cheerily to the second mate: "Does n't look so bad, after all, does it?"

The second mate was marching to and fro on the bridge, tripping down with small steps one moment, and the next climbing with difficulty the shifting slope of the deck. At the sound of Jukes's voice he stood still, facing forward, but made no answer.

"Hallo! That 's a heavy one," said Jukes, swaying to meet the long roll till his lowered hand touched the planks. This time the second mate made in his throat a noise of an unfriendly nature.

He was an oldish, shabby little fellow, with bad teeth and no hair on his face. He had been shipped in a hurry in Shanghai that trip when the second officer brought from home had delayed the ship three hours in port by contriving (in some manner Captain MacWhirr could never understand) to fall overboard into an empty coal-lighter alongside; and had to be sent ashore to the hospital with concussion of the brain and a broken limb or two.

VI

JUKES was not discouraged by the unsympathetic sound. "The Chinamen must be having a lovely time of it down there," he said. "It 's lucky for them the old girl has the easiest roll of any ship I 've ever been in. There, now. This one was n't so bad."

"You wait," snarled the second mate. With his sharp nose, red at the tip, and his thin, pinched lips, he always looked as though he were raging inwardly, and he was concise in his speech to the point of rudeness. All his time off duty he spent in his cabin with the door shut, and keeping so still in there that he was supposed to fall asleep as soon as he had disappeared; but the man who came in to wake him for his watch on deck would invariably find him with his eyes wide

open, flat on his back in the bunk, and glaring irritably from a soiled pillow. He never wrote any letters, did not seem to hope for news from anywhere, and though he had been heard once to mention West Hartlepool, it was with extreme bitterness and only in connection with the charges in a boarding-house. He was one of those men who are picked up by ships in the ports of the world. They are competent enough, appear hopelessly hard up, show no evidence of any sort of vice, and carry about them all the signs of manifest failure. They come aboard on an emergency, care for no ship afloat, live in their own atmosphere of casual connection amongst their shipmates, who know nothing of them, and make up their minds to leave at inconvenient times. They clear out, with no words of leave-taking, in some God-forsaken port that other men would fear to be stranded in, and go ashore in company with a shabby sea-chest corded like a treasure-box, and

with an air of shaking the ship's dust off their feet.

"You wait," he repeated, balancing in great swings with his back to Jukes, motionless and implacable.

"Do you mean to say we are going to catch it hot?" asked Jukes, with boyish interest.

"Say? I say nothing. You don't catch me!" snapped the little second mate with a mixture of pride, scorn, and cunning, as if Jukes's question had been a trap cleverly detected. "Oh, no! None of you here shall make a fool of me if I know it," he mumbled to himself.

Jukes reflected rapidly that this second mate was a mean little beast, and in his heart he wished poor Jack Allen had never smashed himself up in the coal-lighter. The far-off blackness ahead of the ship was like another night seen through the starry night of the earth—a blackness without stars—the night of the immensities beyond the created universe

revealed in its appalling stillness through a low fissure in the glittering sphere of which the earth is the kernel.

"Whatever there might be about," said Jukes, "we are steaming straight into it."

"*You 've* said it," caught up the second mate, always with his back to Jukes. "You 've said it—mind. Not I."

"Oh, go to Jericho!" said Jukes, frankly; and the other emitted a triumphant little chuckle. "You 've said it," he repeated.

"And what of that?"

"I 've known some real good men get into trouble with their skippers for saying a dam' sight less," answered the second mate feverishly. "Oh, no! You don't catch me."

"You seem deucedly anxious not to give yourself away," said Jukes, completely soured by such absurdity. "I would n't be afraid to say what I think."

"Aye, to me! That 's no great trick. I am nobody, and well I know it."

The ship, after a pause of comparative steadiness, started upon a series of rolls, one worse than the other, and for a time Jukes, preserving his equilibrium, was too busy to open his mouth. As soon as the violent swinging had quieted down somewhat, he said:

"This is a bit too much of a good thing. Whether anything is coming or not, I think she ought to be put head-on to that swell. The old man is just gone in to lie down. Hang me if I don't speak to him!"

But when he opened the door of the chart-room he saw his Captain reading a book. Captain MacWhirr was not lying down: he was standing up, with one hand grasping the edge of the bookshelf and the other holding open before his face a thick volume. The lamp wriggled in the gimbals, the loosened books toppled from side to side on the shelf, the long

barometer swung in jerky circles, the table altered its slant every moment. In the midst of all this stir and movement Captain MacWhirr, very steady on his feet and holding on, was reading in a book.

VII

WHEN Jukes opened the door the Captain showed his eyes above the upper edge, and asked:

"What's the matter?"

"Swell getting worse, sir."

"Noticed that in here," muttered Captain MacWhirr. "Anything wrohg?"

Jukes, inwardly disconcerted by the seriousness of the eyes looking at him over the top of the book, produced an embarrassed grin.

"Rolling like old boots," he said sheepishly.

"Aye! Very heavy. Very heavy. What do you want?"

At this Jukes lost his footing and began to flounder.

"I was thinking of our passengers," he said, in the manner of a man clutching at a straw.

"Passengers?" wondered the Captain, gravely. "What passengers?"

"Why! The Chinamen, sir," explained Jukes, very sick of this conversation.

"The Chinamen! Why don't you speak plainly? Could n't tell what you meant. Never heard a lot of coolies spoken of as passengers before. Passengers, indeed! What 's come to you?"

Captain MacWhirr, closing the book on his forefinger, lowered his arm and looked completely mystified. "Why are you thinking of the Chinamen, Mr. Jukes?" he inquired.

Jukes took a plunge like a man driven to it.

"She 's rolling her decks full of water, sir. Thought you might put her head-on perhaps—for a while. Till this goes down a bit—very soon. Head to the eastward. I never knew a ship roll like this."

He held on in the doorway, and Captain MacWhirr, feeling his grip on the shelf inadequate, made up his mind to

let go in a hurry and fell heavily on the couch.

"Head to the eastward," he said, struggling to sit up. "That 's more than four points off her course."

"Yes, sir. Fifty degrees . . . would just bring her head far enough round to meet this. . . ."

Captain MacWhirr was now sitting up. He had not dropped the book and he had not lost his place.

"To the eastward," he repeated, with dawning astonishment. "To the . . . Where do you think we are bound to? You want me to haul a full-powered steamship four points off her course to make the Chinamen comfortable! Now I 've heard more than enough of mad things done in the world—but this. . . . If I did n't know you, Jukes, I would think you were in liquor. Steer four points off . . . and what afterwards? Steer four points over the other way, I suppose, to make the course good. What

put it into your head that I would start to tack a steamer as if she were a sailing ship?"

"Jolly good thing she is n't," threw in Jukes, with bitter readiness. "She would have rolled every blessed stick out of her this afternoon."

"Aye! And you just would have had to stand and see them go," said Captain MacWhirr, showing a certain animation. "It 's a dead calm, is n't it?"

"It is, sir. But there 's something out of the common coming for sure."

"Maybe. I suppose you have a notion I should be getting out of the way of that dirt," said Captain MacWhirr, speaking with the utmost simplicity of manner and tone, and fixing the oilcloth on the floor with a heavy stare. Thus he noticed neither Jukes's discomfiture nor the mixture of vexation and astonished respect on his face.

"Now here 's this book," he continued with deliberation, slapping his thigh with

the closed volume. 'I've been reading the chapter on the winds there."

This was true. He had been reading the chapter on the winds. When he had entered the chart-room it was with no intention of taking the book down. Some influence in the air—the same influence, probably, that caused the steward to bring without orders the Captain's sea-boots and oilskin coat up to the chart-room—had, as it were, guided his hand to the shelf. And without condescending to sit down he had waded with a conscious effort into the terminology of the subject. He lost himself amongst advancing semicircles, left- and right-hand quadrants, the curves of the tracks, the probable bearing of the centre, the shifts of winds, and the readings of barometer. He tried to bring all these things into a definite relation to himself, and ended by becoming contemptuously angry with such a lot of words and with so much advice that seemed to him all sheer headwork and

supposition without a glimmer of certitude.

"It 's the confoundest thing, Jukes," he said. "If a fellow was to believe all that 's in there he would be running most of his time all over the sea trying to get behind the weather."

Again he slapped his leg with the book, and Jukes opened his mouth, but said nothing.

"Running to get behind the weather! Do you understand that, Mr. Jukes? It 's the maddest thing," ejaculated Captain MacWhirr, with pauses, gazing at the floor profoundly. "You would think an old woman had been writing this. It passes me. If that thing means anything useful, then it means that I should at once alter the course away—away to the devil somewhere, and come booming down on Fu-chau from the northward at the tail of this dirty weather that 's supposed to be knocking about in our way. From the north! Do you understand,

Mr. Jukes? Three hundred extra miles to the distance, and a pretty coal bill to show. I could n't bring myself to do that if every word in there was gospel truth, Mr. Jukes. Don't you expect me. . . ."

And Jukes, silent, marvelled at this display of feeling and loquacity.

"But the truth is that you don't know if the fellow is right, anyhow. How can you tell what a gale is made of till you get it? He is n't aboard here, is he? Very well. Here he says that the centre of them things bears eight points off the wind. But we have n't got any wind, for all the barometer falling. Where 's his centre now?"

"We shall get the wind presently," mumbled Jukes.

"Let it come, then," said Captain MacWhirr, with dignified indignation. "It 's only to let you see, Mr. Jukes, that you don't find everything in books. All these rules for dodging breezes and circumvent-

ing the winds of heaven, Mr. Jukes, seem to me the maddest thing, when you come to look at it sensibly."

He looked up, saw Jukes gazing at him dubiously, and tried to illustrate his meaning.

"About as queer as your extraordinary notion of dodging the ship head to sea, for I don't know how long, to make the Chinamen comfortable; while all we've got to do is to take them to Fu-chau, being expected to get there before noon on Friday. If the weather delays me—very well. There's your log-book to talk straight about the weather. But suppose I went swinging off three hundred miles out of my course and came in two days late, and they asked me: 'Where have you been all that time, Captain?' What could I say to that? 'Went around to dodge the bad weather,' I would say. 'It must 've been dam' bad,' they would say. 'Don't know,' I would have to say; 'I've dodged clear of it.' See that, Jukes? I

have been thinking it all out this afternoon."

He looked up again in his unseeing, unimaginative way. No one had ever heard him say so much at one time. Jukes, with his arms open, in the doorway, was like a man invited to confront a miracle. Unbounded wonder was the intellectual meaning of his eye, while hard incredulity was seated in his whole countenance.

"A gale is a gale, Mr. Jukes," resumed the Captain, "and a full-powered steamship has got to face it. There 's just so much dirty weather knocking about the world, and the proper thing is to go through it with none of what old Captain Wilson of the *Melita* calls storm-strategy. The other day ashore I heard him hold forth about it to a lot of shipmasters who came in and sat at a table next to mine. It seemed to me the greatest nonsense. He was telling them how he—outmanœuvred, I think he said—a terrific gale,

so that it never came nearer than fifty miles to him. A neat piece of headwork, he called it. How he knew there was a gale fifty miles off beats me altogether. It was like listening to a crazy man. I would have thought Captain Wilson was old enough to know better."

Captain MacWhirr ceased for a moment, then said: "It's your watch below, Mr. Jukes?" Jukes came to himself with a start.

"Yes, sir."

"Leave orders to call me at the slightest change," said the Captain. He reached up to put the book away and tucked his legs upon the couch. "Shut the door so that it don't fly open—will you? I can't stand a door banging. They 've put a lot of rubbishy locks in this ship—I must say."

VIII

CAPTAIN MACWHIRR closed his eyes. He did so to rest himself. He was tired, and he experienced that state of mental vacuity which comes upon one at the end of an exhaustive discussion that had liberated some belief matured in the course of meditative years. He had indeed been making his confession of faith, had he only known it. And its effect was to make Jukes on the other side of the door stand scratching his head for a good while.

Captain MacWhirr opened his eyes.

He thought he must have been asleep. What was that loud noise? Wind? Why had he not been called? The lamp wriggled in its gimbals, the barometer swung in circles, the table altered its slant every moment: a pair of limp sea-boots with

collapsed long tops went sliding past the couch. He put out his hand instantly and captured one.

Juke's face appeared in a crack of the door,—only his face, very red, with staring eyes. The flame of the lamp leaped; a piece of paper flew up; a rush of air struck and enveloped Captain MacWhirr. Beginning to draw on the boot he directed an expectant gaze at Jukes's swollen, excited features.

"Came on like this," shouted Jukes. "Five minutes ago . . . all of a sudden."

The head disappeared with a bang, and a heavy splash and patter of drops swept past the closed door as if a pailful of melted lead had been flung against the house. A whistling could be heard now upon the deep, vibrating noise outside.

The stuffy chart-room seemed as full of draughts as a shed. Captain MacWhirr collared the other sea-boot on its violent passage along the floor. He was not

flustered, but he could not find at once the opening for inserting his foot. The shoes he had flung off were scurrying from end to end of the cabin, gambolling playfully over each other like puppies. As soon as he stood up he kicked at them viciously, but without effect.

He threw himself into the attitude of a lounging fencer to reach after his oilskin coat; and afterwards he staggered all over the confined space while he jerked himself into it. Very grave, straddling his legs far apart, and stretching his neck, he started to tie deliberately the strings of his sou'wester under his chin, with thick fingers that trembled slightly. He went through all the movements of a woman putting on her bonnet before a glass, with a mien of strained, listening attention, as though he expected every moment to hear the shout of his name, shouted in the confused clamour that had suddenly beset his ship. Its increase filled his ears while he was getting ready

to go out and confront whatever it might mean. It was tumultuous and very loud, too, made up of the rush of the wind, the crashes of the sea, with that prolonged, deep vibration of the air, like the roll of an immense and remote drum beating the charge of the gale.

He stood for a moment in the light of the lamp—thick, clumsy, shapeless, in his panoply of combat, vigilant and red-faced.

"There 's a lot of weight in this," he muttered.

As soon as he attempted to open the door the wind caught it and he was absolutely dragged out over the doorstep; clinging to the handle, he was flung around, and at once found himself engaged with the wind in a sort of personal scuffle whose object was the shutting of that door. At the last moment a tongue of air scurried in and licked out the flame of the lamp.

Ahead of the ship he perceived a great

darkness lying upon a multitude of white flashes; on the starboard beam a few amazing stars drooped, dim and fitful, above an immense waste of broken seas as if seen through a mad drift of smoke.

On the bridge a knot of men, indistinct and toiling, were making great efforts in the light of the wheel-house windows that shone mistily on their heads and backs. Suddenly, darkness closed upon one pane, then on another. The voices of the lost group reached him after the manner of men's voices in a gale, in shreds and fragments of forlorn shouting snatched past the ear. All at once Jukes appeared at his side, yelling, with his head down:

"Watch—put in—wheel-house shutters —glass—afraid—blow in."

Jukes heard his commander upbraiding.

"This—come — anything — warning — call me."

He tried to explain with the uproar pressing on his lips:

"Light air—remained—bridge—sudden—northeast—could turn—thought—you—sure—hear."

They had gained the shelter of the weather-cloth and could converse with raised voices as people quarrel.

"I got the hands to cover up all the ventilators. Good job I had remained on deck. I did n't think you would be asleep, and so . . . What did you say, sir? What?"

"Nothing," cried Captain MacWhirr. "I said—all right."

"By all the powers! We 've got it this time," observed Jukes in a howl.

"You have n't altered her course?" inquired Captain MacWhirr, straining his voice.

"No, sir. Certainly not. Wind came out right ahead. And here comes the head sea."

A plunge of the ship ended in a shock as if she had landed her forefoot upon something solid. After a moment of still

ness a lofty flight of sprays drove hard with the wind upon their faces.

"Keep her at it as long as we can," shouted Captain MacWhirr.

Before Jukes had squeezed the salt water out of his eyes all the stars had disappeared.

IX

JUKES was as ready a man as any half-dozen young mates that may be caught by casting a net upon the waters, and though he had been somewhat taken aback by the startling viciousness of the first squall he had pulled himself together on the instant, had called out the hands, and had rushed then to secure such openings about the deck as had not been already battened down earlier in the evening. Shouting in his fresh, stentorian voice, "Jump, boys, and bear a hand!" he led in the work, telling himself the while that he had "just expected this."

But at the same time he was growing aware that this was rather more than he had expected. From the first stir of the air on his cheek the gale seemed to take upon itself the accumulated impetus of an avalanche. Heavy sprays enveloped the

Nan-Shan from stem to stern, and instantly, in the midst of her regular rolling, she began to jerk and plunge as though she had gone mad with fright.

Jukes thought: "This is no joke." While he was exchanging explanatory yells with his Captain a sudden lowering of the darkness came upon the night, falling before their vision like something palpable. It was as if the masked lights of the world had been turned down. Jukes was uncritically glad to have his Captain at hand. It relieved him, as though that man had, by simply coming on deck, taken at once most of the gale's weight upon his shoulders. Such is the prestige, the privilege, and the burden of command.

Captain MacWhirr could expect no comfort of that sort from any one on earth. Such is the loneliness of command. He was trying to see, with that watchful manner of a seaman who stares into the wind's eye as if into the eye of an adversary, to penetrate the hidden

intention and guess the aim and force of the thrust. The strong wind swept at him out of a vast obscurity; he felt under his feet the uneasiness of his ship, and he could not even discern a shadow of her shape. He wished it were not so; and very still he waited, feeling stricken by a blind man's helplessness.

To be silent was natural to him, dark or shine. Jukes at his elbow made himself heard, yelling cheerily in the gusts: "We must have got the worst of it at once, sir." A faint burst of lightning quivered all round as if flashed into a cavern—into a black and secret chamber of the sea, with a floor of foaming crests.

It unveiled for a sinister, fluttering moment a ragged mass of clouds hanging low, the lurch of the long outlines of the ship, the black figures of men caught on the bridge, heads forward, as if petrified in the act of butting. The darkness palpitated down upon all this, and then the real thing came at last.

X

IT was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a Vial of Wrath. It seemed to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion and a rush of great waters, as if an immense dam had been blown up to windward. It destroyed at once the organised life of the ship by its scattering effect. In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind. It isolates one from one's kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it were—without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him.

Jukes was driven away from his com-

mander. He fancied himself whirled a great distance through the air. Everything disappeared, even for a moment his power of thinking, but his hand had found within six feet of him one of the rail-stanchions. This he embraced with the ardour of love that will not be thwarted. It saved his body and steadied his soul so far that it became conscious of an intolerable distress. It was by no means alleviated by an inclination to disbelieve the reality of this experience. Though young, he had seen some bad weather and had never doubted his ability to imagine the worst; but this was so much beyond his powers of fancy that it appeared incompatible with the existence of any ship whatever. He would have been incredulous about himself in the same way, perhaps, had he not been so greatly harassed by the necessity of exerting a continuous wrestling effort against a force trying to tear him away from his hold. Moreover, the conviction of not being utterly de-

stroyed returned to him through the sensations of being half drowned, bestially shaken, and partly choked. He thought: "Heavens! What's this?"

It seemed to him he remained there precariously alone with the stanchion for a long, long time. The rain poured on him, flowed, drove in sheets. He was plunged in rushing water like a diver holding on to a stake planted in the bed of a swollen river. He breathed in gasps, and sometimes the water he swallowed was fresh, and sometimes it was salt. For the most part he kept his eyes shut tight, as if suspecting his sight might be destroyed in the immense flurry of the elements. When he ventured to blink hastily, he derived some moral support from the green gleam of the starboard light shining feebly upon the flight of rain and sprays. He was actually looking at it when its ray fell upon the uprearing head of the sea which put it out. He saw the head of the wave topple over, adding the mite of

its crash to the tremendous uproar raging around him, and almost at the same instant the stanchion was wrenched from his grasp. After a crushing thump on his back he found himself suddenly afloat and borne away. His first irresistible notion was that the whole China Sea had climbed on the bridge. Then, more sanely, he concluded himself gone overboard. All the time he was being tossed, flung, and rolled in great volumes of water, he kept on repeating mentally, with the utmost precipitation, the words: "My God! My God! My God! My God!"

All at once, in a revolt of misery and despair, he formed the crazy resolution to get out of that. And he began to thresh about with his arms and legs. But as soon as he commenced his wretched struggles he discovered himself to have become somehow mixed up with a face, an oilskin coat, somebody's boots. He clawed ferociously all these things in turn, lost them, found them again, lost them

once more, and was caught in the firm clasp of a pair of stout arms. He returned the embrace closely round a thick, soft body. He had found his Captain.

They tumbled over and over each other, tightening their hug. Suddenly the water let them down with a brutal bang, and, stranded against the side of the wheel-house, out of breath and bruised, they were left to stagger up in the wind and hold on where they could.

Jukes came out of it rather horrified, as though he had just escaped some unparallelled outrage directed at his feelings. It had weakened his faith in himself. He started, shouting aimlessly to the man he could feel near him in that fiendish blackness, "Is it you, sir? Is it you, sir?" till his temples seemed ready to burst. And he heard in answer a voice, as if crying far away, as if screaming to him fretfully from a very great distance the one word, "Yes!" It was this tinge of irritation

which silenced him rather than the difficulty of making himself heard. Other seas swept again over the bridge. He received them defencelessly right over his bare head, with both his hands engaged in holding.

The motion of the ship was extravagant. Her lurches had an appalling helplessness; she pitched, as if taking a header into a void and seemed to find a wall to hit every time. When she rolled she fell on her side headlong as if she were beginning to tumble, turning down a slope, and she would be righted by such a demolishing blow that Jukes felt her reeling as a clubbed man reels before he collapses. In the darkness round her the gale howled and scuffled about gigantically, as though the entire world were a black gully. At certain moments the air would stream against the ship as if sucked through a tunnel with a concentrated, solid force of impact that seemed to lift her clean out of the water, and to keep her up for an in-

stant with only a quiver running through her from end to end. And then she would begin her tumbling again as if dropped back into a boiling caldron. Jukes tried hard to compose his mind and judge things coolly.

Both ends of the *Nan-Shan* were under water, as though she had no more freeboard than a raft. The sea, flattened down in the heavier gusts, would uprise and overwhelm them in snowy rushes of foam expanding wide, beyond both rails, into the night. And on this dazzling sheet, spread under the blackness of the clouds and emitting a bluish glow, Captain MacWhirr could catch a desolate glimpse of a few tiny specks black as ebony, the tops of the hatches, the battened companions, the heads of the covered winches, the foot of a mast. This was all he could see of his ship. Her middle structure—covered by the bridge which bore him, his mate, the dark wheel-house where a man was steering, shut up with

the fear of being swept overboard together with the whole thing in one great crash—her middle structure was like a half-tide rock awash upon a coast. It was like an outlying rock in the night, with the water boiling up, streaming over, pouring off, beating round—like a rock in the surf to which shipwrecked people cling before they let go—only it rose, it sank, it rolled continuously, without respite and rest, like a rock that had miraculously struck adrift from a coast and gone wallowing upon the sea.

She was being looted with a senseless, destructive fury; trysails torn out from the extra gaskets, double-lashed awnings blown away, bridge swept clean, weather-cloths burst, rails twisted, light-screens smashed—and two of the boats had gone already. They had gone unheard and unseen, melting, as it were, in the shock and smother of the wave. It was only later, when, upon the white flash of another high sea hurling itself amidships,

Jukes had a rapid vision of two pairs of davits leaping black and empty out of the solid blackness, with one overhauled fall flying and an iron-bound block threshing in the wind, that he became aware of what had happened within about three yards of his back.

He poked his head forward, groping for the ear of his commander. His lips touched it—big, fleshy, very wet. He cried in an agitated tone:

"The boats are going now, sir."

And again he heard that voice, distinct and faint, forced and ringing feebly, but with a penetrating effect of quietness in the enormous discord of noises, as if sent out from some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes of the gale; again he heard a man's voice,—the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution, and purpose, that shall be pronouncing confident words on the last day, when heavens fall and justice is done,—and it

was crying to him as if from very, very far:—"All right."

Jukes thought he had not managed to make himself understood.

"Our boats—I say boats—the boats, sir! Two gone!"

The same voice, within a foot of him, and yet so remote, yelled sensibly:

"Can't be helped."

Captain MacWhirr had never turned his face, but Jukes caught some more words on the wind.

"What can — expect — Hammering through—Such—Bound to leave—something behind—Stands to reason."

Watchfully Jukes listened for more. No more came. This was all Captain MacWhirr had to say; and Jukes could picture to himself rather than see the broad squat back before him. An impenetrable obscurity pressing down upon the ghostly glimmers of the sea harboured the mysterious madness of all this rush, deluge, and uproar. Suddenly Jukes im-

agined himself completely indifferent to it all. It was too much. A sort of dull conviction seized upon him that there was nothing to be done.

If the steering-gear did not give way, if the sea did not burst the deck in or smash one of the hatches, if the engines did not give up, if way could be kept on her against this terrific wind, and she did not bury herself in one of these awful seas, of whose white crests alone, topping high above her bows, he could now and then get a sickening glimpse,—then there was a chance of her coming out of it. Something within him seemed to turn over, bringing uppermost the feeling that the ship was lost.

"She's done for," he said to himself with a surprising mental agitation, as though he had discovered an unexpected meaning in this thought. One of these things was bound to happen. Nothing could be prevented now and nothing could be remedied. The men on board did not

count, and the ship could not last. This weather was too impossible.

It was like the maddest of dreams: a dream in which you inhabit a world ready to fly to pieces and are jostled rudely against a man you cannot see. Jukes felt an arm thrown heavily over his shoulders. And to this overture he responded with great intelligence by catching hold of his Captain round the waist.

They stood clasped thus in the blind night, bracing each other against the wind, cheek to cheek and lip to ear, in the manner of two battered hulks lashed stem-to-stern together.

XI

JUKES heard the voice of his commander hardly any louder than before, but nearer, as though, starting to march athwart the prodigious rush of the hurricane, it had approached him, bearing that strange effect of quietness like the serene glow of a halo.

"D' ye know where the hands got to?" it asked, vigorous and evanescent at the same time, overcoming the strength of the wind, and swept away from Jukes instantly.

Jukes did n't know. They were all on the bridge when the real force of the hurricane struck the ship. He had no idea where they had crawled to. Under the circumstances they were nowhere, for all the use that could be made of them. Somehow the Captain's wish to know distressed Jukes.

"Want the hands, sir?" he cried, apprehensively.

"Ought to know," asserted Captain MacWhirr. "Hold hard."

They held hard. An outburst of unchained fury, a vicious rush of the wind, absolutely steadied the ship. Her disordered motion was checked and she only rolled short and swift; she rocked quick and light like a child's cradle for a terrific moment of suspense, while the whole atmosphere, as it seemed, streamed furiously past her, roaring away from the tenebrous earth.

It suffocated them, and with eyes shut they tightened their grasp. What, from the magnitude of the shock, might have been a column of water, running upright in the dark, butted against the ship, broke short, and fell on her bridge, crushingly from on high, with a dead, burying weight.

A flying fragment of that collapse, a mere splash, enveloped them in one swirl

from their feet over their heads, violently, filling their ears, mouths, and nostrils with salt water. It knocked out their legs, wrenched hastily at their arms, seethed away swiftly under their chins, and opening their eyes they saw the piled-up masses of foam dashing to and fro amongst what looked like the fragments of a ship. She had given way as if driven straight in. They had felt her give under them, and in their panting breasts their hearts yielded, too, before the tremendous blow; and all at once she sprang up to her desperate plunging as if trying to scramble out from under the ruins.

The seas in the dark seemed to rush from all sides to keep her back where she might perish. There was hate in the way she was handled, and a ferocity in the blows that fell. She was like a living creature thrown to the rage of a mob: hustled terribly, struck at, borne up, flung down, leaped upon. Captain MacWhirr and Jukes kept hold of each other,

deafened by the noise, gagged by the wind; and the great physical tumult beating about their bodies brought, like an unbridled display of passion, a profound trouble to their souls. One of those wild and appalling shrieks that are heard at times passing mysteriously overhead in the steady roar of a hurricane, like a long scream of pain from something living, immense and tormented, swooped, as if borne on wings, upon the ship, and Jukes tried to outscream it.

"Will she live?"

The cry was wrenched out of his breast It was as unintentional as the birth of a thought in the head, and he heard nothing of it himself. It all became extinct at once—thought, intention, effort; and of his cry the inaudible vibration added to the tempest-waves of the air.

He expected nothing from it—nothing at all. For, indeed, what answer could be made? But after a while he heard with amazement the frail and resisting voice in

his ear,—the dwarf sound, unconquered in the giant tumult,—

"She may!"

It was a dull yell, more difficult to seize than a whisper,—the unsubstantial and passing shadow of a yell. Jukes accepted it with bitterness. And presently the voice returned again, half submerged in the vast crashes, like a ship battling against the waves of an ocean.

"Let 's hope so!" it cried, small, lonely, and unmoved, a stranger to the visions of hope or fear, and it flickered into disconnected words: "Ship—This — Never — Anyhow — For the best." Jukes gave it up contemptuously.

And then, as if it had come suddenly upon the one thing fit to withstand the power of a storm, it seemed to gain force and firmness for the last broken shouts:

"Keep on hammering—builders—Good men—And chance it—Rout—Engines—Good man."

XII

CAPTAIN MACWHIRR removed his arm from Jukes's shoulders and thereby ceased to exist for his mate, so dark it was. Jukes experienced a great deception, as though of undeniable right he had expected to obtain an utterance of precise effect. After a tense stiffening of every muscle he would let himself go limp all over. The gnawing of profound discomfort existed side by side with an incredible disposition to somnolence, as though he had been buffeted and worried into drowsiness. The wind would get hold of his head and try to shake it off his shoulders; his clothes, full of water, were as heavy as lead, stiff like sheet-iron, cold and dripping like an armour of melting ice: he shivered. It lasted a long time; and, with his hands contracted by

cramp closed hard on his hold, he was letting himself sink slowly into the depths of bodily misery. There was no suggestion of end to it, as there is no end to the horror of a nightmare. Jukes's mind became concentrated upon himself in an aimless, idle way, and when something pushed lightly at the back of his knees he nearly, as the saying is, jumped out of his skin.

In the start forward he bumped the back of Captain MacWhirr, who did n't move, and then a hand gripped his thigh. A lull had come, a menacing lull of the wind, the holding of a stormy breath—and he felt himself pawed all over. It was the boatswain. He had recognised the hands, so thick and enormous that they seemed to belong to some new species of man.

The boatswain had arrived on the bridge, crawling on all fours against the wind, and had found the chief mate's legs with the top of his head. Immediately

he crouched and began to explore Jukes's person upwards, with clumsy, prudent, apologetic touches, as became an inferior.

He was an ill-favoured, undersized, gruff sailor of fifty, coarsely hairy, short-legged, long-armed, resembling an elderly ape. His strength was immense; and in his great lumpy paws, bulging like brown boxing-gloves on the end of his furry fore-arms, the heaviest objects were handled like playthings. Apart from the grizzled pelt on his chest, the menacing demeanour, and the hoarse voice, he had none of the classical attributes of his rating. His good nature amounted almost to imbecility; the men did what they liked with him, and he had not an ounce of initiative in his character, which was easy-going and talkative. For these reasons Jukes naturally disliked him; but Captain MacWhirr, to Jukes's scornful disgust, seemed to regard him as a first-rate petty officer.

He pulled himself up by Jukes's coat.

taking that liberty with the greatest moderation, and only so far as it was forced upon him by the hurricane. "What is it, bo's'n, what is it?" yelled Jukes, impatient with the foreboding of some odious trouble. What could that fraud of a bo's'n want on the bridge? The typhoon had got on Jukes's nerves. The husky bellowings of the other, though unintelligible, seemed to suggest a state of lively satisfaction. There could be no mistake. The old fool was pleased with something.

The boatswain's other hand had found some other body, for in a changed tone he began to inquire: "Is it you, sir? Is it you, sir?" The wind strangled his howls.

"Yes!" cried Captain MacWhirr.

XIII

ALL that the boatswain, out of a superabundance of yells, could make clear to Captain MacWhirr was the bizarre intelligence that "All them Chinamen in the fore 'tween-deck had fetched away, sir." Jukes, to leeward, could hear these two shouting within six inches of his face, as you may hear on a still night half a mile away two men conversing across a field. He heard Captain MacWhirr's exasperated "What?—What?" and the strained pitch of the other's hoarseness. "In a lump . . . seen . . . myself. Awful sight, sir . . . thought . . . tell you."

Jukes remained indifferent in the overpowering force of the hurricane, which made the very thought of action utterly vain. Besides, being very young, he had

found the occupation of keeping his heart completely steeled against the worst so full of excitement that he had come to feel an impatient dislike towards any other form of activity whatever. The immediate peril had an atrocious side—the violence, the darkness, the uproar—which made the business of enduring it all surprisingly engrossing. He was n't in the least scared; he knew that very well; and the proof of it was that, firmly believing he would never see another sunrise, he could be now sitting down, in a manner of speaking, as calm as possible under that belief.

These are the moments of do-nothing heroics to which even good men surrender at times. Many officers of ships can no doubt recall a case in their experience when just such a trance of confounded stoicism would come all at once over a whole ship's company. The mere recollection of such a passage is enough to bring back all the original dismay. It is

difficult to allude to it without flinging swear-words backwards into the past; not precisely at the men themselves, which would be like throwing stones, but upon the unhonoured memory at large.

Jukes, however, had no wide experience of men or storms. He conceived himself to be calm—inexorably calm; calm as the very statue of calmness in the night and terror of a storm. It suited him to be left alone thus, and it seemed also as though really nothing more could be required of him. But as a matter of fact he was cowed; not abjectly, but only so far as a decent man may, without becoming loathsome to himself.

It was rather like a forced-on numbness of spirit. The long, long stress of a gale does it; the suspense of the interminably culminating catastrophe; the trial of sustained violence going on endlessly, as though time itself were hurled upon one; the formidable hint of annihilation in the sweep and roar of the wind. And there

is a bodily fatigue in the mere holding on to existence within the excessive tumult; a searching and insidious fatigue that penetrates deep into a man's breast to cast down and sadden his heart, which is incorrigible, and of all the gifts of the earth—even before life itself—aspires to peace.

Jukes was benumbed much more than he supposed. He stood very wet, very cold, stiff in every limb, and in a momentary hallucination of swift visions (it is said a drowning man thus reviews all his life) he was run up against by memories altogether unconnected with his present situation. He remembered his father, for instance; a worthy but fanciful business man, who, at an unfortunate crisis in his affairs, went quietly to bed and died forthwith in a state of resignation. Jukes did not recall these circumstances, of course; but, remaining otherwise unconcerned, he remembered distinctly the poor man's face, a certain game of nap played when

quite a boy in Table Bay, on board a ship since lost with all hands, the thick eyebrows of his first skipper; and, without any emotion, as he might years ago have walked listlessly into her room and seen her sitting there with a book, he remembered his mother,—dead, too, now,—the resolute woman left badly off, who had been very firm in his bringing up.

It could not have lasted more than a second, perhaps not so much. A heavy arm had fallen about his shoulders; Captain MacWhirr's voice was speaking his name into his ear. "Jukes! Jukes!"

He detected the tone of deep concern. The wind had thrown its weight on the ship, trying to pin her down amongst the seas. They made a clean breach over her as over a deep-swimming log; and the gathered weight of crashes menaced monstrously from afar. They flung out of the night with a ghostly light on their crests, the light of sea-foam that in an expanding, boiling up, pale flash showed upon

the slender body of the ship the toppling rush, the downfall, and the seething, mad scurry of each wave. Never for a moment could she shake herself clear of the water. Jukes, rigid, perceived in her motion the ominous sign of haphazard floundering. She was no longer struggling intelligently. It was like the beginning of the end; and the note of busy concern in Captain MacWhirr's voice sickened him like an exhibition of blind and pernicious folly.

The spell of the storm had fallen upon Jukes. He was penetrated by it, absorbed by it; he was rooted in it with a rigour of dumb attention. Captain MacWhirr persisted in his cries, but the wind got between them like a solid wedge. He hung round Jukes's neck as heavy as a stone, and suddenly the sides of their heads knocked together. "Jukes. Mr. Jukes—I say."

He had to answer that voice that would not be silenced. He answered in the customary manner: "Yes, sir."

And directly his heart, corrupted by the storm that breeds a craving for peace, rebelled desperately against the tyranny of training and command.

XIV

CAPTAIN MACWHIRR continued his efforts. He had his mate's head fixed firm in the crook of his elbow and pressed it to his yelling lips mysteriously. Sometimes Jukes would break in, admonishing hastily, "Look out, sir"; or Captain MacWhirr would bawl an earnest exhortation to "Hold hard, there," and the whole black universe seemed to reel together with the ship. They paused. She floated yet. And Captain MacWhirr would resume his shouts. ". . . Says — whole lot — fetched away . . . ought to see . . . what 's the matter?"

At the beginning of the gale all hands had taken refuge in the port alleyway. It had a door aft, which they shut; it was very dark, cold, and dismal there. At a

heavy fling of the ship they would groan all together in the dark, and there were uneasy mutters when an exceptionally heavy sea boarded the ship and tons of water could be heard scuttling about as if trying to get at them. The boatswain was keeping up a gruff talk, but a more unreasonable lot of men, he said afterwards, he had never been with. They were snug enough there out of harm's way, and not wanted to do anything either, and yet they did nothing but grumble and complain peevishly like so many sick kids. Finally one of them said that if there had been at least some light to see each other's noses by it would not be so bad. It was making him crazy, he declared, to lie there in the dark waiting for the blamed hooker to sink. "Why don't you go outside, then, and be done with it?" the boatswain turned on him.

This called up general execration. The boatswain found himself overwhelmed with reproaches of all sorts. They seemed

to take it ill that a lamp was not instantly created for them out of nothing. They would whine after a light to get drowned by—anyhow! And though the unreason of their revilings was patent, since no one could hope to reach the lamp-room, which was forward, he became greatly distressed. He did not think it was decent of them to nag at him like this. He said so and was met by a general contumely. He sought refuge, therefore, in an embittered silence. Their grumbling and sighing and muttering worried him greatly, but by-and-by it occurred to him that there were six globe lamps hung in the 'tween-deck and that there could be no harm in depriving the coolies of one of them.

The *Nan-Shan* had an athwartship bunker which, being frequently used as cargo space, communicated by an iron door with the fore 'tween-deck. Its manhole was the foremost one in the alleyway. The boatswain could get in, therefore, without coming out on deck at all;

but, to his great surprise, he found he could induce no one to help him in taking off the manhole cover. He groped for it all the same, but one of the crew lying in his way refused to budge. "Why! I only want to get you that blamed light you are crying for," he expostulated, almost pitifully. Somebody told him to go and put his head in a bag. He regretted he could not recognise the voice and that it was too dark to see, otherwise, as he said, he would have put a head on *that* son of a sea-cook, anyway, sink or swim. Nevertheless, he had made up his mind to show them he could get light, if he were to die for it. Through the violence of the ship's rolling, every movement was dangerous. To be lying down seemed labour enough. He nearly broke his neck dropping into the bunker. He said he fell down, and was kept shooting from side to side in the dangerous company of a heavy iron bar—a coal-trimmer's slice probably—left down there by somebody.

This thing made him as nervous as though it had been a wild beast. He could not see it, the inside of the bunker coated with coal dust being perfectly and impenetrably black, but he heard it sliding and clattering and striking, here and there, always in the neighbourhood of his head. It seemed to make an extraordinary noise, too, to give heavy thumps as though it had been as big as a bridge girder. This was remarkable enough for him to notice while he was flung from port to starboard and back again, and clawing desperately the smooth sides of the bunker in the endeavour to stop himself. The door into the 'tween-deck not fitting quite true, he saw a thread of dim light at the bottom.

Being a sailor and a still active man, he did not want much of a chance to regain his feet; and, as luck would have it, in scrambling up he put his hand on the iron slice, picking it up as he rose. Otherwise he would have been afraid of the thing

breaking his legs or at least knocking him down again. At first he stood still. He felt unsafe in this darkness that seemed to make the ship's motion unfamiliar, unforeseen, and difficult to counteract. He felt so much shaken for a moment that he dared not move for fear of "taking charge again." He had no mind to get battered to pieces in that bunker.

He had hit his head twice; he was dazed a little. He seemed to hear yet so plainly the clatter and bangs of the iron slice flying about his ears that he tightened his grip to prove to himself he had it there safe in his hand. He was vaguely amazed at the plainness with which down there he could hear the gale raging. Its howls and shrieks seemed to take on in the emptiness of the bunker something of the human character, of human rage and pain—being not vast, but infinitely poignant. And there were, with every roll, thumps, too, — profound, ponderous thumps, as if a bulky object of five-ton

weight or so had got play in the hold. But there was no such thing in the cargo. Something on deck? Impossible. Or alongside? Could n't be.

XV

HE thought all this quickly, clearly, competently, like a seaman, and in the end was puzzled. It occurred to him, too, that the hands in the alleyway had started scrambling and howling since he had left them, in a sort of confused, uproarious way. But as the manhole had remained open he ought to have heard them more distinctly, much nearer, as it were. This noise, though, came deadened, from outside, together with the washing and pouring of water on deck above his head. Wind? Must be. It made down there a row like the shouting of a big lot of crazed men. And he discovered in himself a desire for a light, too, if only to get drowned by, and a nervous anxiety to get out of that bunker as quick as possible.

He pulled back the bolt; the heavy iron plate turned on its hinges; and it was as though he had opened the door to sounds of the tempest. A gust of hoarse yelling met him; the air was still; and the rushing of water overhead was covered by a tumult of strangled, throaty shrieks that produced the effect of desperate confusion. He straddled his legs the whole width of the doorway and stretched his neck. And at first he perceived only what he had come to seek—four small, yellow flames swinging violently on the great body of the dusk.

It was like the gallery of a mine, with a row of stanchions in the middle and cross-beams overhead, penetrating into the gloom ahead—infinitely. And to port there loomed like the caving in of one of the sides a bulky mass with a slanting outline. The whole place, with the shadows and the shapes, moved all the time—irresistibly. The boatswain glared; the ship lurched to starboard and a great howl

came from that mass that had the slant of fallen earth.

Pieces of wood whizzed past. Planks, he thought, inexpressibly startled and flinging back his head. At his feet a man went sliding over, open-eyed, on his back, straining with uplifted arms for nothing; and another came bounding like a detached stone with his head between his legs and his hands clenched. His pigtail whipped in the air, he made a grab at the boatswain's legs, and from his opened hand a bright white disc rolled against the boatswain's foot. He recognised a silver dollar, as one would recognise a familiar object in the improbabilities of a nightmare.

He yelled at it with astonishment. With a precipitated sound of trampling and shuffling of bare feet and with guttural cries, the vague mound piled up to port, detached itself from the ship's side, and shifted to starboard, sliding, inert and struggling, to a dull, brutal thump

The cries ceased. The boatswain heard a long moan, the roar and whistling of the wind; he saw an inextricable confusion of heads and shoulders, naked soles kicking upwards, fists raised, tumbling backs, legs, pigtails, faces. "Good Lord!" he cried, horrified, and banged to the iron door upon this vision.

This was what he had come on the bridge to tell. He could not keep it to himself, and on board ship there is only one man to whom it is worth while to unburden yourself. On his passage back the hands in the alleyway swore at him for a fool. Why did n't he bring that lamp? What the devil did coolies matter to anybody? And when he came out the extremity of the ship made what went on inside of her appear indeed of little moment.

At first he thought he had left the alleyway in the very moment of her sinking. The bridge ladders had been washed away, but an enormous sea filling the

after-deck floated him up. After that he had to lie on his stomach for some time, holding to a ring-bolt, getting his breath now and then, and swallowing salt water. He struggled farther on his hands and knees, too frightened and distracted to turn back. In this way he reached the after part of the wheel-house. In that comparatively sheltered spot he found the second mate. He was pleasantly surprised, his impression being that everybody on deck must have been washed away a long time ago. He asked eagerly where the Captain was.

The second mate was lying low, like a malignant little animal under a hedge. "Captain? Gone overboard after getting us into this mess." The mate, too, for all he knew or cared. Another fool. They would n't have a chance to kill any more good men. Did n't matter. Everybody was going by-and-by.

The boatswain crawled out again into the strength of the wind; not because he

much expected to find anybody, he said, but just to get away from "that man." He crawled out as outcasts go to face an inclement world. Hence his great joy at finding Jukes and the Captain. But what was going on in the 'tween-deck was to him a minor matter by that time, like a distant and still memory made more faint by the exigencies of a turbulent existence. Besides, it was difficult to make yourself heard. But he managed to convey the idea that the Chinamen had broken adrift and that he had come up on purpose to report this. As to the hands, they were all right. Then, almost appeased, he subsided on the deck in a sitting posture, hugging with his arms and legs the stand of the engine-room telegraph—an iron casting as thick as a post. When that went—why, he expected he would go too. He gave no more thought to the coolies.

Captain MacWhirr made Jukes understand he wanted him to go down below—to see.

"What could I do, sir?" and the trembling of his whole wet body caused his voice to sound like bleating.

"See! Bo's'n—says—adrift."

"That bo's'n is a confounded fool," howled Jukes shakily.

What was the good of going to see? He did n't want to see. What could one do single-handed with two hundred Chinamen? It was impossible to make that man understand the most obvious things. The absurdity of the demand made upon him revolted Jukes. He was as unwilling to go as if the moment he had left the deck the ship were sure to sink.

"I must know—can't leave——"

"They 'll settle, sir."

"Fight — bo's'n says fight — Why? Can't have—fighting—board ship. . . . Rather keep you here—case—I should—washed overboard myself. . . . Stop it—some way—You see and tell me—through engine-room tube. . . . Don't

want you—come up here—too often. . . . Dangerous—moving about—deck."

Jukes, held with his head in chancery, had to listen to what seemed horrible suggestions.

"Don't want—you get lost—so long—ship don't. . . . Rout—Good man—Ship—through this—all right yet."

All at once Jukes understood he would have to go.

"Do you think she will?" he screamed.

But the wind, as if made angry by Captain MacWhirr, seemed to throw itself at them with redoubled force and devoured the reply out of which Jukes heard only the one word pronounced with great energy.

". . . Always. . . ."

Captain MacWhirr released Jukes and, bending over the boatswain, yelled, "Get back with the mate." Jukes only knew that the arm was gone off his shoulders. He was dismissed with his orders—to do what? He was exasperated into letting

go his hold carelessly and on the instant was blown away. It seemed to him he would be blown right over the stern. He flung himself down and the boatswain, who was following, fell on him.

"Don't you get up yet, sir," cried the boatswain. "No hurry!"

A sea swept over. Jukes understood the boatswain to say that the bridge ladders were gone. "I 'll lower you down, sir, by your hands," he screamed. He shouted also something about the smoke-stack being as likely to go overboard as not. Jukes thought it very possible and imagined the fires out, the ship helpless —and he down there. The boatswain by his side kept on yelling. Was it a warning? "What? What is it?" Jukes cried distressfully, and the other repeated, "What would my old woman say if she saw me now?"

XVI

IN the alleyway, where a lot of water splashed in the dark, the men were still as death, till Jukes stumbled against one of them and cursed him savagely for being in the way. Two or three voices then asked, eager and weak, "Any chance for us, sir?"

"What 's the matter with you fools?" he said brutally. He felt as though he could throw himself down amongst them and never move any more. But they seemed cheered, and, in the midst of warnings, "Look out!" — "Mind the manhole lid, sir," they lowered him into the bunker. The boatswain tumbled down after him, and as soon as he had picked himself up he remarked:

"She would say, 'Serve you right, you old fool, for going to sea.' "

The boatswain had some means, and made a point of alluding to them frequently. His wife—a fat woman—and two grown-up daughters kept a greengrocer's shop.

In the dark, Jukes, unsteady on his legs, listened to a faint thunderous patter. A deadened screaming went on steadily at his elbow as it were; and from above the louder tumult of the storm descended upon these near sounds. His head swam. To him, too, in that bunker, the motion of the ship seemed novel and menacing, sapping his resolution as though he had never been afloat before.

He had half a mind to scramble out, but the remembrance of Captain MacWhirr's voice made this impossible. And yet he felt he could do nothing. He had an inclination to sit down, and the feeling of helplessness in that beastly black hole made him sick of his life. His orders were to go and see. What was the good of it? he wanted to know. Enraged, he

told himself he would see—of course. But the boatswain, staggering clumsily, warned him to be careful how he opened that door; there was a blamed fight going on. And Jukes, as if in great bodily pain, desired irritably to know what the devil they were fighting for.

"Dollars. Dollars, sir. All them rotten chests got burst open. Blamed money skipping all over the place and they are tumbling after it head over heels, tearing and biting like anything. A regular little hell in there."

Jukes convulsively opened the door. The short boatswain by his side peered too, like a curious baboon.

One of the lamps had gone out, broken perhaps. Rancorous, guttural cries burst out loudly on their ears, and a strange panting sound,—the working of all these straining breasts. A hard blow hit the side of the ship; water fell above with a stunning shock, and in the forefront of the gloom, where the air was reddish and

thick, Jukes saw a head bang the deck violently, two thick calves waving, muscular arms twined round a naked body, a yellow face open-mouthed and with a set, wild stare look up and slide away. An empty chest clattered, turning over, a man fell head first with a jump as if lifted by a kick; and further off, indistinct, a mass of men streamed like rolling stones down a bank, beating the deck with their feet and flourishing their arms wildly. The hatchway ladder was loaded with coolies, swarming on it like bees on a branch. They hung in a crawling, stirring cluster, beating with their fists the underside of the battened hatch, and the headlong rush of the water was heard in the intervals of their yelling. The ship heeled over more and they began to drop off; first one, then two, then all the rest together, falling straight with a great cry. Jukes was confounded. The boatswain, with gruff anxiety, begged him, "Don't you go in there, sir."

The whole place seemed to twist upon itself, jumping incessantly the while, and when the ship rose to a sea Jukes fancied that all these men would be shot upon him in a body. He swung the door to, and with trembling hands pushed at the bolt.

As soon as his mate had gone, Captain MacWhirr sidled and staggered as far as the wheel-house. Its door being hinged forward, he had to fight the gale for admittance, and when at last he managed to enter, it was as if he had been fired through the wood. He stood within, holding the handle.

The steering gear leaked steam and in the confined space the glass of the binnacle made a shiny oval in a thin white fog. The wind howled, hummed, whistled, with sudden booming gusts that rattled the doors and the shutters in the vicious patter of sprays. Two coils of lead-line and a small canvas bag hung on a long lanyard swung wide off and came back, clinging to the bulkheads. The gratings

under foot were nearly afloat, with every sweeping blow of a sea water squirted violently through the cracks all round the door, and the man at the helm had flung down his cap, his coat, and stood propped against the gear-casing in a striped cotton shirt open on his breast. The little brass wheel in his hands seemed a bright and fragile toy. The cords of his neck stood hard and lean, a dark patch lay in the hollow of his throat, and his face was still and sunken as in death.

Captain MacWhirr wiped his eyes. The sea that had nearly taken him overboard had to his great annoyance washed his sou'wester hat off his bald head. The fluffy, fair hair, soaked and darkened, resembled a mean skein of cotton threads festooned round his bare skull. He breathed heavily and his face, glistening with sea water, was of a hot crimson with the wind, with the sting of sprays. He looked as though he had come off sweating from before a furnace.

"THE LITTLE BRASS WHEEL IN HIS HANDS SEEMED A BRIGHT AND FRAGILE TOY."

"You here?" he muttered heavily.

The second mate had also found his way into the wheel-house. He had fixed himself in a corner with his knees up, a fist pressed against each temple, and this attitude suggested rage, sorrow, resignation, surrender, with a sort of concentrated unforgiveness. He said mournfully and defiantly:

"My watch below now. Ain't it?"

The steam-gear clattered, stopped, clattered again; and the helmsman's eyeballs seemed to project out of a hungry face, as if the compass card behind the binnacle glass had been meat. God knows how long he had been there steering, as if forgotten by all his shipmates. The bells had not been struck, there had been no reliefs, the ship's routine had gone down wind, but he was trying to keep her head north-northeast. The rudder might have been gone for all he knew, the fires out, the engines broken down, the ship ready to roll over like a corpse. He was anx-

ious not to get muddled and lose control of her head, because the compass card swung far both ways, wriggling on the pivot, and sometimes seemed to whirl right around. It was hard to make out the course she was making. He suffered from mental stress. He was horribly afraid also of the wheel-house going. Mountains of water kept on falling on it. When the ship took one of her desperate dives the corners of his lips twitched.

Captain MacWhirr looked up at the wheel-house clock. Screwed to the bulkhead, it had a white face, on which the black hands appeared to stand quite still. It was half-past one in the morning.

"Another day," he muttered to himself. The second mate heard him and, lifting his head as one grieving amongst ruins:

"You won't see it break," he exclaimed. His wrists and his knees could be seen to shake violently. "No, by God, you won't! . . ." He took his head again between his fists.

The body of the helmsman had moved slightly, but his head did n't budge on his neck,—like a stone head fixed to look one way from a column. During a roll that all but took his booted legs from under him, and in the very stagger to save himself, Captain MacWhirr said austerely:

"Don't you pay any attention to that man."

And then, with an indefinable change of tone, very grave, he added:

"He is n't on duty."

The sailor said nothing. The hurricane boomed, shaking the little place, which seemed air-tight; and the light of the binnacle flickered all the time.

"You have n't been relieved," Captain MacWhirr went on, looking down. "I want you to stick on, though, as long as you can. You 've got the hang of her. Another man coming here might make a mess of it. Would n't do. No child's play. And the hands are probably busy

with a job down below. . . . Think you can?"

The steering-gear leaped into an abrupt short clatter, stopped smouldering like an ember, and the still man, with a motionless gaze, burst out as if all the passion in him had gone into his lips:

"By heavens, sir, I can steer for ever if you don't talk to me."

"Oh! Aye! All right. . . ." The Captain lifted his eyes for the first time to the man. . . . "Hackett."

And he seemed to dismiss this matter from his mind. He stooped to the engine-room speaking-tube, blew in, and bent his head. Mr. Rout, below, answered, and at once Captain MacWhirr put his lips to the mouthpiece.

XVII

WITH the uproar of the gale around him he applied alternately his lips and his ear, and the engineer's voice mounted to him, harsh and as if out of the heat of an engagement. One of the stokers was disabled, the others had given up, the second engineer and the donkey-man were firing up. The third was standing by the steam valve. The engines were being tended by hand. How was it above?

"Bad enough. It rests with you," said Captain MacWhirr. Was the mate down there yet? No? He would be presently. Would Mr. Rout let him talk through the speaking-tube. Through the deck speaking-tube. Because he—the Captain—was going out again on the bridge directly. There was some trouble with.

the Chinamen. They were fighting amongst themselves. Could n't allow fighting, anyhow.

Mr. Rout had gone away, and Captain MacWhirr could feel against his ear the pulsation of the engines like the beat of the ship's heart. Mr. Rout's voice down there cried something, distantly. The ship pitched headlong, the pulsation leaped with a hissing tumult and stopped dead. Captain MacWhirr's face was impassive and his eyes were fixed aimlessly at the crouching shape of the second mate. Again Mr. Rout's voice cried out in the depths, and the pulsating beat recommenced, with slow strokes—growing swift.

Mr. Rout came back to the tube.

"It don't matter much what they do," he said hastily; and then, with irritation, "She takes these dives as if she never meant to come up again."

"Awful sea," said the Captain's voice from above.

"Don't let me drive her under," barked Solomon Rout up the pipe.

"Dark and rain. Can't see what 's coming," uttered the voice. "Must—keep—her—moving—enough to steer—and chance it," it went on to state distinctly.

"I am doing as much as I dare."

"We are — getting — smashed up—a good deal up here," proceeded the voice mildly. "Doing — fairly well — though. Of course, if the wheel-house should go——"

Mr. Rout, bending an attentive ear, muttered peevishly something under his breath.

But the deliberate voice up there became animated to ask:

"Jukes turned up yet?" Then, after a short wait: "I wish he would bear a hand. I want him to be done and come up here in case of anything—look after the ship. I am all alone. The second mate lost . . ."

"What?" shouted Mr. Rout into the engine-room, taking his head away. Then up the tube he cried, "Gone overboard?" and clapped his ear to.

"Lost his nerve," the voice from above was proceeding in a matter-of-fact tone. "Damn awkward, this."

Mr. Rout, listening with bowed neck, opened his eyes wide. However, he heard something like the sounds of a scuffle and broken exclamations coming down to him. He strained his hearing, and all the time Beale, the third engineer, with his arms upraised, held between the palms of his hands the rim of a little black wheel projecting at the side of a big copper pipe. He seemed to be poising it above his head, as though it were a correct attitude in some sort of game.

To steady himself he pressed his shoulder against the white bulkhead, with one knee bent and a sweat-rag tucked in the belt hung upon his hip. His smooth cheek was begrimed and flushed, and the

coal-dust on his eyelids, like the black pencilling of a make-up, enhanced the liquid brilliance of the whites, giving to his youthful face something of a feminine, exotic, and fascinating aspect. When the ship pitched he would with hasty movements of his hands screw hard at the little wheel.

"Gone crazy," began the Captain's voice suddenly. "Rushed at me—just now. Had to knock him down—this minute. You heard, Mr. Rout?"

"The devil!" muttered Mr. Rout. "Look out, Beale."

His voice rang out like the blast of a warning trumpet between the iron walls of the engine-room. Painted white, they rose high into the dusk of the skylight, sloping like a roof; and the whole lofty space resembled a chamber in a monument, divided by floors of iron grating, with lights flickering at different levels, and the still gloom within the columnar stir of machinery under the motionless

swelling of the cylinders. A loud and wild resonance, made up of all the noises of the hurricane, dwelt in the still warmth of the air. There was in it the smell of hot metal, of oil, and a slight mist of steam. The blows of the sea seemed to traverse it, in an unringing, stunning shock, from side to side.

Gleams, like pale, long flames, trembled upon the polish of metal, from the flooring below the enormous crank-heads emerged in their turns with a flash of brass and steel—going over; while the connecting rods, big-jointed, like skeleton limbs, seemed to thrust them down and pull them up again with an irresistible precision. And deep in the half-light other rods dodged to and fro, crossheads nodded quickly, disks of metal rubbed against each other, swift and gentle in a commingling of shadows and gleams.

XVIII

SOMETIMES all those movements would slow down simultaneously, as if they had been the functions of a living organism—powerful, silent, patient, and unerring, but stricken suddenly by the blight of languor; and Mr. Rout's eyes would blaze darker in his long, pale face. He was fighting this fight in a pair of carpet slippers. A short, shiny jacket barely covered his loins, and his pale wrists protruded far out of the tight sleeves as though the emergency had added to his stature, lengthened his limbs, augmented his pallor, hollowed his eyes.

He moved, climbing high up, disappearing low down, with a restless, purposeful industry, and when he stood still, holding the guard-rail in front of the starting-gear, he would keep glancing to

the right at the steam-gauge, at the water-gauge, upon the white wall in the light of a swaying lamp. The mouths of two speaking-tubes gaped stupidly at his elbow, and the dial of the engine-room telegraph resembled a clock of large diameter, bearing on its face curt words instead of figures. They stood out heavily black, around the black pivot-head of the solitary hand, emphatically symbolic of loud exclamations: Ahead — Astern — Slow—Half—Stand by . . . and the fat black hand pointed down to the word Full—which, thus singled out, captured the eye as a sharp cry secures attention.

The wood-encased bulk of the low-pressure cylinder, frowning portly from above, emitted a faint wheeze at every thrust, and, except for that low hiss, the engines worked their steel limbs headlong or slow with a silent, determined smoothness. And all this—the white walls, the moving steel, the floor plates under Solomon Rout's feet, the floors of iron grating

above his head, the dusk and the gleams — uprose and sank continuously, with one accord, upon the harsh wash of the waves against the ship's side. The whole loftiness of the place, booming hollow to the great voice of the wind, swayed at the top like a tree, would lay over bodily, as if borne down this way and that by tremendous blasts.

"You 've got to hurry up," shouted Mr. Rout, as soon as he saw Jukes.

Jukes's glance was wandering and tipsy, his red face was puffy, as though he had overslept himself. He burst into the engine-room like a man who had been racing over hills and dales for his life. He had had an arduous road and had travelled over it with immense vivacity, the agitation of his mind corresponding to the scrambling exertions of his body. He had rushed up out of the bunker—stumbling in the alleyway amongst a lot of bewildered men who, trod upon, asked "What 's up, sir?" in awed mutters all

round him in the dark—down into the stoke-hole, missing many iron rungs in his hurry, into a place deep as a well, black as Tophet, narrow like a corridor, tipping over back and forth like a seesaw. Lumps of coal skipped to and fro from end to end, rattling like an avalanche of pebbles on a slope of iron.

Somebody in there moaned with pain, and somebody else crouched over what seemed the body of a man; a lusty voice blasphemed, and the glow under each fire-grate was like a pool of flaming blood radiating quietly in a velvety blackness.

A gust of wind struck upon the nape of Jukes's neck, and next momen the felt it streaming about his wet ankles The stoke-hole ventilators hummed; and in front of the six fire-doors two men, stripped to the waist, staggered and stopped, apparently wrestling with two shovels.

"Hallo! Plenty of draught now," yelled the second at once, as though he

had been all the time looking out for Jukes. The donkey-man, a dapper little chap with a dazzling fair skin and a tiny, gingery mustache, worked in a sort of mute transport. They were keeping a full head of steam, and a profound rumbling sound, as of an empty furniture van trotting over a bridge, made a sustained bass to all the other noises of the place.

"Blowing off all the time," went on yelling the second. With a sound as of a hundred scoured saucepans the orifice of a ventilator spat upon his shoulder a sudden gush of salt water, and he volleyed a stream of curses upon all things on earth, including his own soul; ripping and raving, and all the time attending to his business. With a sharp clash of metal, the ardent pale glare of the fire opened upon his bullet head, showing his spluttering lips, his insolent eyes, and with a clash closed like the white-hot wink of an iron eye.

"Where 's the blooming ship? Can you

tell me—blast my eyes! Under water —or what? Are the condemned cowls gone to Hades, hey? Don't you know anything—you jolly sailor-man, you?"

Jukes, after a bewildered moment, had been helped by a roll to dart through, and as soon as his eyes took in the comparative vastness, peace, and brilliance of the engine-room, the ship, settling her stern heavily in the water, sent him charging head down upon Mr. Rout.

The chief's arm, long like a tentacle and straightening as if worked by a spring, went out to meet him and deflected his rush into a spin towards the speaking-tubes. At the same time Mr. Rout repeated earnestly:

"You 've got to hurry up—whatever it is."

Jukes yelled, "Are you there, sir?" and listened. Nothing. Suddenly the roar of the wind fell straight into his ear, but presently a small voice shoved aside the shouting hurricane quietly:

"You, Jukes?—Well?"

Jukes was ready to talk; it was only time that seemed to be wanting. And, somehow, he mistrusted the ability of the other man to understand. It was easy enough to account for everything. He could perfectly imagine the coolies battened down in the reeking 'tween-deck, lying sick and scared between the rows of chests. Then one of these chests, or perhaps several at once breaking loose in a roll, knocking out others, sides splitting, lids flying open, and all these clumsy Chinamen staggering up in a body to save their property. Afterwards, every fling of the ship would hurl that tramping, yelling mob here and there, from side to side, in a whirl of smashed wood, torn clothing, rolling dollars. And a struggle once started, they would be unable to stop themselves. Nothing could stop them now except main force. It was a disaster. He had seen it, and that was all he could say. Some of them must be

dead, he believed. The rest would go on fighting. . . .

He sent up his words tripping over each other, crowding the narrow tube. They mounted as if into a silence of an enlightened comprehension dwelling alone up there with a storm. There was no circumventing this development. And he wanted to be dismissed from the face of that odious trouble intruding on the great need of the ship.

XIX

HE listened. Before his eyes the engines turned with slow labour that in the moment of going off into a mad fling would stop dead at Mr. Rout's show, "Look out, Beale!" They seemed to wait in an intelligent immobility stilled in midstroke, a heavy crank arrested on the cant, as if conscious of time itself being on their side. Then, with a "Now, then!" from the chief and the sound of a breath expelled through clenched teeth, they would accomplish the interrupted revolution and begin another.

There was the prudent sagacity of enormous strength in their movements. This was their work—this coaxing of a ship over the fury of waves and into the fierce eye of the wind. Mr. Rout's chin had sunk on his breast, and at times he

watched them from under his forehead like a man plunged deep in thought.

The voice that kept the hurricane out of Jukes's ear began:

"Take the hands . . . " and left off unexpectedly.

"What could I do with the hands, sir?"

A harsh, abrupt, imperious clang exploded suddenly. The three pairs of eyes flew up to the telegraph dial to see the hand dart upwards from "Full" to "Stop" as if snatched by a devil. And then these three men in the engine-room had the intimate sensation of a check upon the ship, of a strange shrinking, as if she had gathered herself for a leap.

"Stop her!" bellowed Mr. Rout.

Nobody,—not even Captain MacWhirr, who caught sight of a white line of foam coming on at such a height that he could n't believe his eyes,—nobody knew the steepness of that sea and the awful depth of the hollow the hurricane had

scooped behind that running wall of water.

It raced to meet the ship, and, with a pause, as of girding the loins, she lifted her bows and leaped. The flames in all the lamps sank, darkening the engine-room. One went out. She had not leaped quite high enough, for with a tearing crash and a swirling, raving tumult, tons of water fell upon her deck as though she had darted under the very foot of a cataract.

Down there they looked at each other, stunned.

"Swept from end to end, by God!" bawled Jukes.

She pitched into the hollow straight down as if tumbling from a cliff. The engine-room toppled forward menacingly, like the inside of a tower nodding in an earthquake. An awful racket of iron things falling came from the stoke-hole.

Instead of recovering herself she hung head down while the souls of men on

board cried aloud to her to rise. She hung long enough for Beale to drop on his hands and knees as if he meant to fly on all fours out of the engine-room, and for Mr. Rout to turn his head slowly, rigid, cavernous, with the lower jaw dropping. Jukes had shut his eyes, and his face in a moment became hopelessly blank, like the face of a blind man.

But she rose slowly, staggering as if she had to lift a mountain with her bows.

Mr. Rout shut his mouth, Jukes blinked, and little Beale stood up hastily.

"Another one like this and that 's the last of her!" cried the chief.

He and Jukes looked at each other, and the same thought came into their heads—the Captain! Everything must have been swept away. Steering-gear gone—men gone—ship like a log. All over directly.

"Rush!" ejaculated Mr. Rout thickly, glaring with enlarged, doubtful eyes at Jukes, who answered him by an irresolute glance.

"HE AND JUKES LOOKED AT EACH OTHER."

The clang of the telegraph gong soothed them instantly. The black hand dropped in a flash from "Stop" to "Full."

"Now then, Beale!" cried Mr. Rout.

The steam hissed low. The piston-rods slid in and out. Jukes put his ear to the tube. The voice was ready for him. It said:

"Pick up all the money. Bear a hand now. I 'll want you up here." And that was all.

"Sir?" called up Jukes. There was no answer. It struck him that if he had got an answer he would n't have known what to say. Nothing could be said.

He staggered away as a defeated man staggers away from the field of battle. He had got in some way or other a cut above his left eyebrow, a cut to the bone. He was not aware of it in the least: quantities of the China Sea, large enough to break his neck for him, had gone over his head, had cleaned, washed, and salted that wound. It did not bleed, but only

gaped red; and this gash over the eye, his dishevelled hair, the disorder of his streaming clothes, gave him the aspect of a man worsted in a fight with fists.

"Got to pick up the dollars," he appealed to Mr. Rout, smiling pitifully, at random.

"What 's that? Pick up . . . ? I don't care . . ." Then quivering in every muscle, but with an exaggeration of paternal tone, "Go away now, for God's sake. You deck people 'll drive me silly. There 's that second mate been going for the old man. Don't you know? You fellows are going wrong for want of something to do . . ."

At these words Jukes discovered in himself the beginnings of anger. He turned to go the way he had come, full of hot scorn for the chief. In the stoke-hole the plump donkey-man manœuvred his shovel mutely, as if his tongue had been cut out; but the second was carrying on like a sort of noisy, undaunted

maniac, who, nevertheless, had preserved his skill in the art of stoking under a marine boiler.

"Hallo, you wandering officer! Hey! Can't you get some of your slush-slingers to wind up a few of them ashes? I am getting choked with them here. Curse it! Hallo! Hey! Remember the articles!—'sailors and firemen to assist each other.' Hey! D' ye hear?"

Jukes was climbing out frantically, and the other, lifting up his face after him, howled:

"Can't you speak? What are you poking about here for? What 's your game, anyhow?"

A frenzy possessed Jukes. By the time he was back amongst the men in the darkness of the alleyway he felt ready to wring all their necks at the slightest sign of hanging back. The very thought of it exasperated him. *He* could n't hang back. They should n't!

XX

THE impetuosity with which he came amongst them carried them along. They had already been excited and startled at all his comings and goings. By the fierceness and rapidity of his movements, more felt than seen in his rushes, he appeared formidable—busied with matters of life and death that brooked no delay. At his first word he heard them drop into the bunker one after another obediently, with heavy thumps.

They were not clear as to what would have to be done. "What is it? What is it?" they were asking each other. The boatswain tried to explain; the sounds of a great scuffle surprised them; and the mighty shocks reverberating awfully in the black bunker made them think fear-

fully of the gale. When the boatswain threw open the door it seemed to them that an eddy of the hurricane stealing through the iron sides of the ship had set all the coolies whirling like dust: there came to them a confused uproar, a tempestuous tumult, a fierce mutter, gusts of screams dying away, and the tramping of feet mingling with the blows of the sea.

For a moment they glared, blocking the doorway. Jukes pushed through them brutally. He said nothing and simply darted in. The Chinamen on the ladder, struggling suicidally to break through the battened hatch to a swamped deck, fell off, and he disappeared under them like a man overtaken by an avalanche. The boatswain yelled excitedly:

"Come along! Get the mate! He 'll be trampled to death. Come on!"

They rushed in, stamping on breasts, on fingers, on faces, catching their feet in heaps of clothing, kicking broken wood; but before they could get hold of

him Jukes emerged, waist-deep amongst clawing hands. In the instant he had been lost to view all the buttons of his jacket had gone, its back got split up to the collar, his waistcoat had been torn open. The central, struggling mass went over to the roll, dark, indistinct, helpless, with a wild gleam of eyes in the dim light that swayed after it and jerked when it thumped the ship's side.

"Leave me alone — damn you!" screeched Jukes. "Drive them forward! Watch your chance when she pitches. Forward with them! Drive them against the bulkhead! Jam 'em up!"

The rushing of these eleven men into the seething 'tween-deck was like a splash of cold water into a boiling caldron. The commotion as it were sank for a moment.

The bulk of Chinamen were locked in such a compact scrimmage that, linking their arms and aided by an appalling dive of the ship, the seamen sent it forward in

one great shove, like a solid block. Behind their backs small clusters and loose bodies tumbled from side to side.

The boatswain performed prodigious feats of strength. With his long arms open and each great paw clutching at a stanchion, he stopped the rush of seven entwined Chinamen rolling like a boulder. His joints cracked; he said, "Ha!" and they flew apart. But the carpenter showed the greater intelligence. He went back into the alleyway, where he found several coils of cargo gear, chain, and rope. With these, life-lines were rigged.

There was really no resistance. The struggle, however it began, had turned into a scramble of blind panic. If they had started after their dollars, they were by that time fighting only for their footing. They would take each other by the throat merely to save themselves from being hurled about. Whoever got a hold anywhere would kick at the others who

caught at his legs and hung on, till a roll sent them flying together across the deck.

The coming of the white devils was a terror. Had they come to kill? Those torn out of the ruck became very limp in the seamen's hands; some, dragged aside by the heels, were passive—like dead bodies, with open, fixed eyes; here and there one would fall on his knees as if begging for mercy; several whom the excess of fear made unruly were hit with hard fists between the eyes and cowed, while those who were hurt submitted to rough handling, blinking rapidly without a plaint. Faces streamed with blood; there were raw places on the shaven heads, scratches, bruises, gashes. The broken porcelain out of the chests was mostly responsible for the latter. Here and there a Chinaman with his pig-tail unplaited nursed a bleeding sole.

They had been ranged closely after having been shaken into submission, cuffed a little to allay excitement, ad-

dressed in gruff words of encouragement that sounded like promises of evil. They sat on the deck in ghastly, drooping rows; and, at the end, the carpenter, with two hands to help him, moved from place to place, setting taut and hitching the lines. The boatswain, with one leg and one arm embracing a stanchion, was busy with a lamp pressed to his breast, trying to get a light, and growling all the time like an industrious gorilla. The figures of seamen stooped repeatedly, with the movements of gleaners, and everything was being flung into the bunker—clothing, smashed wood, broken china, and the dollars too, gathered up in men's jackets. Now and then one of them would stagger towards the doorway with his arms full of rubbish, and rows of dolorous, slanting eyes followed his movements.

With every roll of the ship the long rows of Celestials would sway forward brokenly, and her headlong dives knocked together the line of shaven polls from end

to end. When the wash of tons of water rolling on the deck, within reach of his hand, died away for a moment, it seemed to Jukes, yet quivering from his exertions, that in his mad struggle down there he had overcome the wind somehow; that a silence had fallen upon the ship, a silence in which the sea knocked thunderously at her sides.

Everything had been cleared out of the 'tween-deck; all the wreckage, as the men said. They stood erect and tottering, out of a multitude of heads and drooping shoulders. Here and there a coolie sobbed for his breath; where the high light fell Jukes could see the salient ribs of one, the yellow, wistful face of another; bowed necks; or would meet a dull stare directed at his face. He was amazed that there had been no corpses, but the lot of them seemed at their last gasp, and they appeared to him more pitiful than if they had all been dead.

Suddenly one of the coolies began to

speak. The light came and went on his lean, straining face; he threw his head up like a baying hound. From the bunker came the sounds of knocking and the tinkle of some dollars rolling loose: he stretched out his arm, his mouth yawned black, and the incomprehensible guttural words that did not seem to belong to a human language—the hooting, babbling utterance of the man—startled Jukes as if a brute had tried to be eloquent.

Grunts began to be heard about the 'tween-deck. Two more started mouthing what seemed to Jukes fierce denunciations. He ordered the hands out hurriedly. He went last himself, backing through the door, while the grunts rose to a loud murmur and hands were extended after him as after a malefactor. The boatswain shot the bolt and remarked uneasily:

"Seems as if the wind had dropped, sir."

The men were glad to get back into

the alleyway. Secretly each of them thought that at the last moment he could rush out on deck, and that was a comfort. There is something horribly repugnant in the idea of being drowned under a deck. Now they had done with the Chinamen, they again became conscious of the ship's position.

Jukes, on coming out, found himself up to the neck in the noisy water. He gained the bridge and discovered he could see shapes as if his sight had become preternaturally penetrating. He saw faint outlines. They recalled not the familiar aspect of the *Nan-Shan*, but something remembered—an old dismantled steamer he had seen years ago rotting on a mud-bank. She recalled that wreck.

There was no wind, not a breath, except the faint currents created by the lurches of the ship. The smoke tossed out of the funnel was settling down upon her deck. He breathed it as he passed forward. He felt the deliberate throb of

the engines and heard small sounds that seemed to have survived the great uproar: the knocking of broken fittings, the rapid tumbling of some piece of wreckage on the bridge. He traced the squat shape of his Captain holding on to a twisted bridge-rail, motionless, and swaying as if rooted to the planks. The unexpected stillness of the air oppressed him like an overpowering wind.

"We have done it, sir," he gasped.

"Thought you would," said Captain MacWhirr.

"Did you?" murmured Jukes to himself, bitterly.

"Wind fell all at once," went on the Captain. Jukes burst out:

"If you think it was an easy job . . ."

But his Captain, clinging to the rail, paid no attention.

"According to the books the worst is not over yet."

"If most of them had n't been half dead with seasickness and fright not one

of us would have come out alive," said Jukes.

"Had to do what 's fair by them," mumbled MacWhirr, stolidly. "You don't find everything in books."

"Why, I believe they would have risen on us if I had n't ordered the hands out of that, pretty quick," continued Jukes with warmth.

XXI

AFTER the whisper of their shouts their ordinary tones, so distinct, seemed to them very loud in the amazing stillness of the air. It seemed to them they were talking in a dark and echoing vault.

Through a jagged aperture in the dome of clouds the light of a few stars fell upon the black sea, rising and falling confusedly with heavy splashes, all about the ship. Sometimes the head of a watery cone would fall on board and mingle with the rolling flurry of foam on the swamped deck; and the *Nan-Shan* wallowed heavily within a cistern of circular form in the depth of the clouds resting on the sea. This ring of dense vapours gyrating madly around the calm of the centre encompassed the ship like a motionless and unbroken wall of a blackness inconceivably

sinister. Within, the sea, as if agitated by an internal commotion, leaped in peaked mounds that jostled each other, slapping heavily against the ship, and a low moaning sound — the infinite plaint of the storm's fury—came from beyond the limits of the menacing calm. Captain MacWhirr remained silent and Jukes's ready ear caught suddenly the faint, long-drawn roar of some immense wave rushing under that thick blackness which made the appalling boundary of his vision.

"Of course," he started, "they thought we had caught at the chance to plunder them. Of course! You said—pick up the money. Easier said than done. They could n't tell what was in our heads. We came in, smash!—right into the middle of them. Had to do it by a rush. . . ."

"As long as it 's done," mumbled the Captain, without attempting to look at Jukes. "Had to do what 's fair."

"We shall find yet there 's the devil to pay when this is over," said Jukes, feeling very sore. "Let them only recover a bit and you 'll see. They will fly at our throats, sir. Don't forget, sir, she is n't a British ship now. These brutes know it well, too. The damn'd Siamese flag!"

"We are on board all the same," remarked Captain MacWhirr.

"The trouble 's not over yet," insisted Jukes, prophetically, reeling and catching on. "She 's a wreck," he added faintly.

"The trouble 's not over yet," assented Captain MacWhirr, half aloud. "Look out for her a minute."

"Are you going off the deck, sir?" asked Jukes, hurriedly, as if the storm was sure to pounce upon him as soon as he had been left alone with the ship.

He saw her, battered and solitary, labouring heavily in a wild scene of mountainous black waters lit by the gleams of distant worlds. She moved slowly,

breathing into the still core of the hurricane the excess of her strength in a white cloud of steam; and the deep-toned vibration of the escape was like the defiant trumpeting of a living creature of the sea impatient for the renewal of the contest. It ceased suddenly. A moan in the stillness of the air swooped upon Jukes's head.

It was so plain that he looked up. He saw the stars shining into the pit of black vapours marking the circle of rushing winds and headlong seas. The ship was cut off from the peace of the earth. The wall rose high, with smoky drifts issuing from the inky edge that frowned upon the ship under the patch of glittering sky. The stars, too, seemed to look at her intently, as if for the last time, and the cluster of their splendour sat like a diadem on a lowering brow.

Captain MacWhirr had gone into the chart-room. There was no light there, but he could feel the disorder of that

place where he used to live tidily. His arm-chair was upset. The books had tumbled out on the floor; he scrunched a piece of glass under his boot. He felt for the matches and found a box on a shelf with a deep ledge. He struck one and, puckering the corners of his eyes, he held out the little flame towards the barometer, whose glittering top of glass and metal nodded at him continuously.

It stood very low—incredibly low—so low that Captain MacWhirr grunted. The match went out, and hurriedly he extracted another with thick, stiff fingers.

Again a little flame burst before the nodding glass and metal of the top. His eyes looked at it, out of the puckers, with attention, as if expecting a whisper. With his grave face he was like a hooded and misshapen pagan burning incense before the oracle of a joss. There was no mistake. It was low.

Captain MacWhirr emitted a low whistle. He forgot himself till the flame

diminished to a blue spark, burnt his fingers, and vanished. Perhaps something had gone wrong with the thing?

There was an aneroid glass screwed above the couch. He turned that way, struck another match, and discovered the white face of the instrument looking at him from the bulkhead meaningly, not to be gainsaid, as though the wisdom of men were made unerring by the indifference of matter. There was no room for doubt now. Captain MacWhirr pshawed at it and threw the match down.

The worst was to come, then, and if the books were right this worst would be very bad. The experience of the last six hours had enlarged his conception of what heavy weather could be like. "It 'll be terrific," he pronounced mentally. He had not consciously looked at anything by the light of the matches but the barometer, and yet somehow he had seen that the water-bottle and glass had been flung out of their stand. It seemed to

give him a more intimate knowledge of the tossing the ship had gone through. "I would n't have believed it," he thought. And his table had been cleared too; his rulers, his pencils, the inkstand, —all the things that had their safe, appointed places,—they were gone from them as if a mischievous hand had plucked them out and flung them on the wet floor. The hurricane had broken in upon the orderly arrangements of his privacy. This had never happened before and the dismay reached the very seat of his composure. And the worst was coming yet! He was glad the trouble in the 'tween-deck had been discovered in time. If she had to go after all, then at least she would n't be going with a lot of people in her fighting tooth and claw. That would have been odious. And in that feeling there was a humane intention and a vague sense of the fitness of things.

These instantaneous thoughts were yet in their essence heavy and slow, partaking

of the nature of the man. He extended his hand to put back the match-box in its corner of the shelf. There were always matches there—by order. The steward had his instructions impressed upon him. "A box—just there, see? Not so very full—where I can put my hand on it, steward. Might want a light in a hurry. Can't tell on board ship *what* you might want in a hurry. Mind now."

And, of course, on his side he would be careful to put it back scrupulously. He did so now, but before he removed his hand it occurred to him that perhaps he would never have occasion to use that box again. The vividness of the notion checked him, and for an infinitesimal fraction of a second his fingers closed again on the small object. This man, disturbed by a storm, hung on to a match-box absurdly, as though it had been a symbol of all those habits that make mainfest the reality of life. He released it at last, and, letting himself fall on the

settee, listened for the first sounds of returning wind.

Not yet. He heard only the wash of water, the heavy splashes and the dull shocks of the confused seas boarding his ship from all sides. She would never have a chance to clear her decks.

XXII

THIS quietude of the air was startlingly tense and unsafe, like a slender hair holding a sword suspended over his head. By this awful pause the storm penetrated the defences of the man and unsealed his lips. He spoke out in the solitude and the pitch-darkness of the cabin, as if addressing another being awakened into a stir of life within his breast.

"I should n't like to lose her," he said, half aloud.

He sat unseen, apart from the sea, from his ship, isolated, as if withdrawn from the very current of his own existence, where such freaks as talking to himself surely had no place. His palms reposed on his knees, he bowed his bull-neck and breathed heavily, surrendering to a strange sensation of weariness, but was

not enlightened enough to recognise in it the fatigue of mental stress.

From where he sat he could reach the door of a wash-stand locker. There should have been a towel there. There was. Good! He wiped his face, then went on rubbing his wet head. He towelled himself with energy in the dark, and then sat still with the towel on his knees. A moment passed in which one could not have known there was a man sitting in that cabin. Then a murmur arose.

"She may come out of it yet."

When Captain MacWhirr came out on deck, which he did brusquely, as though he had suddenly become conscious of having stayed away too long, the calm had lasted already more than fifteen minutes—long enough to make itself intolerable even to his imagination. Jukes, motionless on the forepart of the bridge, began to speak at once. His voice, blank and forced, as though he were talking through hard-set teeth, seemed to spread

out on all sides into the darkness, deepening again upon the confused unrest of the sea.

"I had the wheel relieved. Hackett began to call he was done. He 's lying in there alongside the steering-gear with a face like death. At first I could n't get anybody to crawl out. That bo's'n 's worse than no good, I always said. Thought I would have had to go myself and haul out one of them by the neck."

"Ah, well!" muttered the Captain. He stood watchful by Jukes's side.

"The second mate 's in there, too, holding his head. Is he hurt, sir?"

"No, crazy," said Captain MacWhirr, with decision.

"Looks as if he had had a tumble, though."

"I had to give him a push," explained the Captain.

Jukes gave an impatient sigh.

"It will come very sudden," said Captain MacWhirr, "and from over there, I

fancy. God only knows, though. These books are only good to muddle your head and make you jumpy. It will be bad, and there 's an end. If we only can steam her round in time to meet it! . . . "

A minute passed. Some of the stars winked rapidly and went out.

"You left them pretty safe?" began the Captain abruptly, as though the silence were unbearable.

"Are you thinking of the coolies, sir? I rigged life-lines all ways across that 'tween-deck."

"Did you? Good idea, Mr. Jukes."

"I did n't—think you cared to—know," said Jukes,—the lurching of the ship cut his speech as though somebody had been jerking him around while he talked,—"how I got on with—that infernal job. We did it. And it may not matter in the end."

"Had to do what 's fair, for all—they are only Chinamen. Give them the same chance with ourselves—hang it all! She

is n't lost yet. Bad enough to be shut up—below in a gale——"

"That 's what I thought when you gave me the job, sir," interjected Jukes, moodily.

"—without being battered to pieces," pursued Captain MacWhirr, with rising vehemence. "Could n't let that go on in my ship if I knew she had n't five minutes to live. Could n't bear it, Mr. Jukes."

A hollow, rolling noise, like that of a shout echoing in a rocky chasm, approached the ship and went away again. The last star, blurred, enlarged, as if turning into the fiery mist of its beginning, struggled with the colossal depth of blackness hanging over the ship — and went out.

"Now for it!" muttered Captain MacWhirr. "Mr. Jukes."

"Here, sir."

The two men were growing indistinct to each other. The gathering darkness

embraced, absorbed their erect figures into the opaque gloom.

"We must trust her to go through and come out on the other side. That 's plain and straight. There 's no room for Captain Wilson's storm-strategy here."

"No, sir."

"She will be smothered and swept again for hours," mumbled the Captain. "There 's not much left above deck for the sea to take away—unless you or me."

"Both, sir?" whispered Jukes, breathlessly.

"You are always meeting trouble half way, Jukes," Captain MacWhirr remonstrated, quaintly. "Though it 's a fact that the second mate is no good. D' ye hear, Mr. Jukes? You would be left alone if——"

Captain MacWhirr interrupted himself, and Jukes, glancing on all sides, remained silent.

"Don't you be put out by anything," the Captain continued, mumbling rather

fast. "Keep her facing it. They may say what they like, but the heaviest seas run with the wind. Facing it—always facing it—that 's the way to get through. You are a young sailor. Face it. That 's enough work for any man. Keep a cool head."

"Yes, sir," said Jukes, with a flutter of the heart. In the next few seconds the Captain spoke to the engine-room and got an answer. For some reason Jukes experienced an access of confidence, a thing that came from outside like a warm breath and made him feel equal to every demand. The distant muttering of the darkness stole into his ears. He noted it unmoved, out of that sudden belief in himself, as a man in a shirt of mail would watch a point.

The ship laboured without intermission amongst the black hills of water, paying with this hard tumbling the price of her life. She rumbled in her depths, shaking a white plummet of steam into the night,

and Jukes's thought darted like a skimming bird through the engine-room where Mr. Rout—good man—was ready. When the rumbling ceased it seemed to him that there was a pause of every sound, a dead pause, in which Captain MacWhirr's voice rang out startlingly.

"What 's that? A puff?" It spoke much louder than Jukes had ever heard it before. "On the bow? That 's right. She may come out of it yet."

The mutter of the winds drew near apace. In the forefront could be distinguished a drowsy, waking plaint passing on—and far off the growth of a multiple clamour, marching and expanding. There was the throb as of many drums in it, a vicious, rushing note, and like the chant of a tramping multitude.

Jukes could no longer see his Captain distinctly. The darkness was absolutely piling itself up upon the ship. At most he made out movements, a hint of elbows spread out, of a head thrown up. Captain

MacWhirr was trying to do up the top button of his coat with unwonted haste. The hurricane that has the power to madden the seas, to sink ships, to uproot, trees, to overturn strong walls, and dash the very birds of the air to the ground had found this taciturn man in its path and, doing its utmost, had managed to make him loquacious. Before the renewed wrath of the winds swooped on the ship, Captain MacWhirr found time to declare, in a tone of vexation as it were: "I would n't like to lose her."

He was spared that annoyance.

XXIII

WHEN the *Nan-Shan* came to an anchor the sunshine was bright, the breeze fresh. She came in from a green, hard sea, green like a furrowed slab of jade, streaked and splashed with frosted silver. Even before her story got about, her arrival was noticed on shore and the seamen in harbour said: "Look! Look at that steamer. What 's that? Siamese—is n't she? Just look at her."

She seemed indeed to have served as a target for the secondary batteries of a whole fleet. A hail of shells could not have given her upper works a more broken, torn, and devastated aspect; and she had about her the worn, weary air of ships coming from the far ends of the world—and, indeed, with truth, for in her short passage she had been very far,

sighting, verily, even the coast of the Great Beyond, whence no ship ever returns to give up her crew to the dust of the earth. She was incrusted and grey with salt to the trucks of her masts and to the top of her funnel; as though, as some facetious seaman said, "the crowd on board had fished her out somewhere from the bottom of the sea and brought her in here for salvage." And further, excited by the felicity of his own wit, he offered to give five pounds for her—"as she stands."

Before she had been quite an hour at rest a meagre little man, with a red-tipped nose and a face cast in an angry mould, landed from a sampan on the quay of the Foreign Concession and incontinently turned to shake his fist at her. A tall individual with legs much too thin for a rotund stomach, and with watery eyes, strolled up and remarked:

"Just left her—eh? Quick work."

He wore a soiled suit of blue flannel,

with a pair of dirty cricketing shoes; a dingy grey moustache drooped from his lip, and daylight could be seen in two places between the rim and the crown of his hat.

"Hallo! What are you doing here?" asked the ex-second mate of the *Nan-Shan*, shaking hands hurriedly.

"Standing by—chance worth taking—got a quiet hint," explained the man with the broken hat, in hollow, apathetic wheezes.

The second shook his fist again at the ship.

"There 's a fellow there that ain't fit to have charge of a scow," he declared, quivering with passion, while the other looked about listlessly.

"Is there?"

But he caught sight on the quay of a heavy seaman's chest, painted brown under a fringed sailcloth cover, and lashed with new manila line. He eyed it with pensive interest.

"I would talk and raise trouble if it

was n't for that damned Siamese flag. Nobody to go to—or I would make it hot for him, the fraud! Told his chief—that 's another fraud for you—I had lost my nerve. The greatest lot of ignorant fools that ever sailed the seas! No! You can't think . . ."

"Got your money all right?" inquired his seedy acquaintance, suddenly.

"Yes. Paid me off on board," raged the second mate. " 'Get your breakfast on shore,' says he."

"Mean skunk!" commented the tall man, vaguely, and passed his tongue on his lips. "What about having a drink of some sort?"

"He struck me," hissed the second mate.

"No! You don't say!" The man in blue began to bustle about exceedingly. "Can't possibly talk here. I want to know all about it. Struck—eh? Let 's get a fellow for your chest. I know a quiet place."

Mr. Jukes, who had been scanning the shore through a pair of glasses, informed the chief engineer afterwards that "our late second mate has n't been long in finding a friend. A chap looking uncommonly like a bummer. I saw them walk away together from the quay."

The hammering and banging of the needful repairs did not disturb Captain MacWhirr. The steward found, in the letter he wrote in a tidy chart-room, passages of such absorbing interest that twice he was nearly caught in the act; but Mrs. MacWhirr, in the drawing-room of the forty-pound house, stifled a yawn—perhaps out of self-respect. For she was alone.

She reclined in a plush-bottomed and gilt hammock-chair, near a tiled fireplace, with Japanese fans on the mantel and a glow of coals in the grate. Lifting her hands from time to time she glanced wearily here and there into the many pages. It was not her fault they were so

prosy, so completely uninteresting—from "My darling wife" at the beginning to "Your loving husband" at the end. She could n't be really expected to understand all these ship affairs. She was glad, of course, to hear from him, but she had never asked herself why, precisely. ". . . They are called typhoons . . . not in books. . . . The mate did not seem to like it . . . could n't think of letting it go on. . . ."

She rustled the pages. ". . . . A calm that lasted over twenty minutes," she read perfunctorily, and the next words her thoughtless eyes caught on the top of another page were, ". . . see you and the children again. . . ." He was always thinking of coming home. He had never had such a good salary.

It did not occur to her to turn back over the leaf to look. She would have found it recorded there that between 4 and 6 A.M., on the 25th of December, Captain MacWhirr did actually think that

his ship could not possibly live in such a sea, and that he would never see his wife and children again. Nobody was to know this (his letters got mislaid and lost so often)—nobody but the steward, who had been greatly impressed by that disclosure; so much so, that he risked trying to give the cook some idea of the "narrow squeak we all had" by saying solemnly, "The old man himself had a damn poor opinion of our chance." "How do you know?" contemptuously asked the cook—an old soldier. "He has n't told you, maybe?" "Well, he did drop something," the steward stammered. "Get along with you! He will be coming to tell me next," jeered the old cook over his shoulder.

Mrs. MacWhirr glanced farther, on the alert. ". . . do what 's fair. . . . miserable objects. . . . Only three, with a broken leg each, and one . . . Thought had better keep the matter quiet . . . hope to have done the fair thing. . . ."

She let her hands fall. No. There was nothing about coming home. Must have been expressing merely a pious wish. Mrs. MacWhirr's mind was at ease, and a black marble clock, priced by the local jeweller at £3 18*s.* 6*d.*, had a discreet, stealthy tick.

The door flew open and a girl in the long-legged, short-frocked period of existence flung into the room. A lot of colourless, rather lanky hair was scattered over her shoulders. Seeing her mother, she stood still and directed her pale, prying eyes upon the letter.

"From father," murmured Mrs. MacWhirr. "What have you done with your ribbon?"

The girl put her hands up and pouted.

"He's well," continued Mrs. MacWhirr, languidly. "At least, I think so. He never says." She had a little laugh. The girl's face expressed a blank, wandering indifference, and Mrs. MacWhirr surveyed her with fond pride.

"Go and get your hat," she said after a while. "I am going out to do some shopping. There is a sale at Linom's."

"Oh, how jolly!" uttered the child, impressively, in unexpectedly grave vibrating tones, and bounded out.

XXIV

THE afternoon was fine; the sidewalks were dry. Outside the draper's, Mrs. MacWhirr smiled upon a woman in a black mantle of generous proportions, armoured in jet, ornate with flowers blooming falsely above a bilious matronly countenance. They broke into a swift little babble of greetings and exclamations both together, very hurried, as if the street were ready to yawn open and swallow all that pleasure before it could be adequately voiced.

Behind them the high glass doors were kept on the swing, people could n't pass, men stood aside waiting patiently, and Lydia was absorbed in poking the end of her parasol between the stone flags. Mrs. MacWhirr talked rapidly.

"Thank you so much! This very day.

He 's not coming home yet. Of course, it 's very sad to have him away, but it 's such a comfort to know he keeps so well!" Mrs. MacWhirr drew breath: "The climate there agrees with him," she added, beamingly, as if poor MacWhirr had been away touring in China for the sake of his health.

Neither was the chief engineer coming home yet. Mr. Rout knew too well the value of a good billet.

"Solomon says wonders will never cease," cried Mrs. Rout, joyously, at the old lady in her arm-chair by the fire. Mr. Rout's mother moved slightly her withered hands lying in black half-mittens on her lap.

The engineer's wife's eyes fairly danced on the paper.

"That Captain of the ship he is in—a rather simple man — you remember, mother?— has done something rather clever, Solomon says."

"Yes, my dear," said the old woman

meekly, sitting with bowed silvery head, and that air of still, far-away meditation only very old people have, as if absorbed in nursing the last flickers of life, "I think I remember."

Solomon, Old Sol, Father Sol, The Chief, "Rout, good man—" Mr. Rout, the austere and paternal friend of youth, had been the baby of her many children —all dead now. And she remembered him best as a boy of ten—before he went away to serve his time in some great engineering works in the North. She had seen so little of him since; she had gone through so many years that she had now to retrace her steps to meet him again in the mist of time. Sometimes it seemed as if her daughter-in-law were talking of some strange man.

Mrs. Rout, junior, was disappointed. "H'm, h'm." She turned the page. "How provoking! He does n't say what it is. Says I could n't understand how much there was in it. Fancy! What

could it be, so very clever? What a wretched man not to tell us!"

She read on without further remark, soberly, and at last sat looking silently into the fire. The Chief wrote just a word or two about the typhoon, but something had moved him to express his growing desire for the companionship of the jolly woman. "If it had n't been that mother must be looked after, I would send you your passage money to-day. You could set up a small house out here. I could see you sometimes then. We are not growing younger. . . ."

"He 's well, mother," sighed Mrs. Rout, rousing herself.

"He always was a strong, healthy boy," said the old woman, placidly.

But it was Mr. Jukes's account that was really animated and interesting. His friend in the Western ocean trade imparted it freely to the other officers. "A chap I know writes to me about an extraordinary affair that happened on board

his ship in that typhoon—you know—that was in the papers two months ago. It 's the funniest thing. Just see for yourself what he says. I 'll show you his letter."

There were phrases in it calculated to give the impression of light-hearted indomitable resolution. Jukes had written them in good faith, for he felt thus when he wrote. He described with lurid effect the scenes in the 'tween-deck. ". . . It struck me in a flash that those confounded Chinamen could n't tell we were n't a desperate kind of robbers. 'T is n't good to part the Chinaman from his money if he is the stronger party. We need have been desperate indeed to go thieving in such weather, but what could these beggars know of us? So, without thinking of it twice, I got the hands away in a jiffy. Our work was done—that the old man had set his heart about. We cleared out without staying to inquire how they felt. I am convinced

that if they had not been so unmercifully shaken, and afraid—each individual one of them—to stand up, we would have been torn to pieces. Oh! it was pretty complete, I can tell you; and you may run to and fro across the pond to the end of time before you find yourself with such a job in your hands."

After this he alluded professionally to the damage done to the ship and went on thus:

"It was when the weather quieted down that the situation became confoundedly delicate. It was n't made any better by us having been lately transferred to the Siamese flag; though the skipper can't see that it makes any difference—'as long as *we* are on board,' he says. There are feelings that this man simply has n't got—and there 's an end of it. You might just as well try to make a bedpost understand. But apart from this, it is an infernally lonely state for a ship to be going about in the China seas

with no proper Consuls, not even a gun-boat of her own anywhere—not a body to go to in case of any trouble.

"My notion was to keep them under hatches another fifteen hours or so; we were n't much farther than that from Fu-chau. We would find there most likely some sort of a man-of-war, and once under her guns we were safe enough, for surely any skipper of a man-of-war, English, French, or Dutch, would see white men through as far as a row on board goes. We could get rid of them and their money by delivering them to their Mandarins or Two-tail, or whatever they call these chaps in goggles you see being carried in sedan chairs about their stinking streets.

"The old man would n't see it, somehow. He wanted to keep the matter quiet. He got that notion into his head and a steam windlass could n't drag it out of him. He wanted as little fuss made as possible, 'for the sake of the ship's name

and the owners, for the sake of all concerned,' says he, looking at me very hard. It made me angry, hot. Of course you could n't keep a thing like that quiet, but the chests had been secured in the usual manner, and were safe enough for any earthly gale, but this had been an altogether fiendish business I could n't give you even an idea of.

"Meantime I could hardly keep on my feet. None of us had had a spell of any sort for nearly thirty hours, and there he sat rubbing his chin, rubbing the top of his head, and so bothered he did n't even think of taking his long boots off.

" 'I hope, sir,' says I, 'you won't be letting them out on deck before we make ready for them in some shape or other.' Not, mind you, that I felt very sanguine about controlling if they took charge. Trouble with a cargo of Chinamen is no child's play; I was dam' tired, too. 'I wish,' said I, 'we could throw the whole lot of these dollars down to them and let

them fight it out amongst themselves, while we get a rest.'

"'Now you talk wild, Jukes,' says he, looking up in his slow way, that makes you ache all over, somehow. 'We must plan out something that would be fair to all parties.'

XXV

"I HAD no end of work on hand, and by-and-by I set the hands going, and then I thought I would turn in a bit. I had n't been in my bunk ten minutes when in rushes the steward and begins to pull at my leg.

"'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes, come out! Come on deck, quick, sir! Oh, do come out!'

"The fellow scared all the sense out of me. I did n't know what had happened —another hurricane, or what. Could hear no wind.

"'The Captain 's letting them out. Oh, he is letting them out! Jump on deck, sir, and save us. The chief engineer has just run below for his revolver.'

"That 's what the fool made me under-

stand. However, Father Rout swears he went in there to get a clean pocket-handkerchief. Anyhow, I made one jump into my trousers and flew on deck aft. There was certainly a good deal of noise going on where I could n't see forward of the bridge. Four of the hands with the bo's'n were at work abaft. I passed up to them through the sky-light some of the rifles all the ships on the China coast carry in the cabin and led them on the bridge. On the way I ran against Old Sol, looking startled and sucking at an unlighted cigar. 'Come along!' I shouted to him.

"We charged, seven of us, up to the chart-room. All was over. There was the old man, with his sea-boots still drawn up to the hips and in shirt-sleeves —got warm thinking it out, I suppose. Bun Lim's dandy clerk stood at his elbow, as dirty as a sweep and still green in the face. I could see directly I was in for something.

"'What the devil are these monkey tricks, Mr. Jukes?' asks the old man, as angry as ever he could be. I tell you frankly it made me lose my tongue.

"'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes,' says he, 'do take away these rifles from the men. Somebody 's sure to get shot before long if you don't. Damme, if this ship is n't worse than Bedlam! Look sharp, now! I want you up here to help me and Bun Lim's Chinaman to count that money. You would n't mind lending a hand, too, Mr. Rout, now you are here? The more of us the better.'

"He had settled it all while I was having a snooze. Had we been an English ship, or only going to land our cargo of coolies in an English port like Hong-Kong, for instance, there would have been no end of inquiries and bother, claims for damages, and so on. But these Chinamen know their officials better than we do.

"The old man had the hatches taken

off, and they were all on deck after a night and a day down below. It made you feel queer to see so many gaunt, wild faces together. The beggars were staring at the sky, at the sea, at the ship, as though they had expected the whole thing to have been blown to pieces. And no wonder. They had had a doing that would have shaken the soul out of a white man. But then they say a Chinaman has no soul. He has, though, something about him that is deuced tough. There was a fellow (amongst others of the badly hurt) who had had his eye all but knocked out. It stood out of his head awful swollen, like half a hen's egg. This would have laid a white man on his back; and there was that chap elbowing here and there and talking to the others as if nothing was the matter. They made a great hubbub amongst themselves, and whenever the old man showed his bald head on the fore-side of the bridge, they would all leave off and look at him.

"After he had done his thinking he made that Bun Lim's fellow go down and explain to them how they could get their money. He told me afterwards that all the coolies having worked in the same place and for the same length of time, he reckoned he would be doing the fair thing by them as near as possible if he distributed all we had picked up equally among the lot. You could n't tell one man's dollars from another's, and if you asked each man he was afraid they would lie and he would find himself a long way short. I think he was right there. As to giving up the cash into the hands of any Chinese official he could scare up in Fu-chau, he said he might just as well put the money in his pocket at once for all the good it would be to them. I suppose they thought so too.

"We finished the distribution before dark. It was rather a sight: the sea running high, the ship a wreck to look at, these Chinamen staggering on the bridge

one by one for their share; and the old man, still booted and in his shirt-sleeves, solemnly busy paying out, perspiring like anything, and now and then coming down sharp on myself or Father Rout about one thing or another not quite to his mind. He himself took the share of those who were disabled to them on the No. 2 hatch. There were three dollars left over, and these went to the three most damaged coolies—one to each. We turned to afterwards and shovelled out on deck heaps of wet rags, all sorts of fragments of things without shape, and that you could n't give a name to, and let them settle the ownership themselves.

"This certainly is coming as near as can be to keeping the thing quiet for the benefit of all concerned. What 's your opinion, you pampered Mail-boat swell? The old Chief says that this was plainly the only thing that could be done. The skipper remarked to me the other day, 'These are things you find nothing about in books.'

I think that he had not done badly for such a stupid man. . . ."

THE END

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